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SILVER STEVE OPENED HIS SHIRT FRONT AND REVEALED HIS WHITE SKIN TO THE GAZE OF THE ASTONISHED DON.

OR,

The Man-Mystery of Moonstone.

BY CAPTAIN HOWARD HOLMES,
AUTHOR OF "CAPTAIN COLDGRIP" NOVELS,
"HERCULES GOLDSBUR," "SUNSHINE SAM,"
"SOL SPHINX," "DUDE DESPERADO,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE THEFT OF AN EYE.

"I own that he hasn't the face of a seraph nor the figure of a fairy, but he's harmless an' faithful an' that's why I rather like him. What has he ever done to deserve my friendship more than any other pagan? Nothin'. I saw him for the first time in Diamond Valley, fightin' a grizzly hand to hand, an' when I dropped the b'ar dead in his tracks Wun Look got up, smiled all over his face and vanished. I didn't see him ag'in for a year or more an' then he walked into Moonstone, an' he's been here ever since."

It was ten o'clock at night and the men who heard these words were grouped in a bar-room in the town of Moonstone, the tough capital of the San Juan Mountains in Southwestern Colorado. They composed as hard a looking crowd as one could have found in a week's travel in that part of the country, and the man who had just spoken was perhaps the best and most decent looking of the lot.

His figure was that of a natural born athlete; he had a good-looking face, and long hair trailed over his shoulder after the manner of a dandy of the mines.

Everybody knew Silver Steve, and everybody knew, as well, that he was a man of strong friendships, not quarrelsome, but ready to fight for what he believed was right.

The subject of his remarks stood at one end of the long room where several rough gambling-tables were to be seen.

He was a small man with the brand of the Chinaman on every feature, and a closer inspection would have shown that he was the possessor of but one eye.

The yellow man was interested in the turn of the cards and seemed oblivious of the attention he was calling from the group along the bar. If Silver Steve's words reached him, he gave no sign that they had, but continued to watch the game, nor moved until one of the players fell back and glared at his one eye with the ferocity of a tiger.

"I can never win when that infernal yellow-skin is around," he said. "Somehow or other he comes in whenever I want to make a stake and he never turns about until I am broke and a pauper."

Wun Look said nothing in reply, but turned to the cards again and watched the shuffle by a man who had just won the biggest stake on the board.

"Why don't you go back to China?" continued the loser, growing more and more sullen. "If you would take that one eye out of camp we would get along better and there'd not be so many turns of Fortune's hands against us poor devils."

The Celestial threw one look toward the bar and caught the eye of Silver Steve.

If a look passed between the two it was not seen, but all the same the Chinaman walked away.

"Going, are you? When I have nothing more to stake—when you have charmed the cards against me—you slink off, chuckling in your sleeve. Hold on thar!"

The broken gambler had risen and was glaring at the retreating form of the Celestial.

Wun Look paid no attention to the words which he must have heard, but continued toward the door, when the gambler sprung forward and in an instant whipped out a cocked revolver.

"Drop that, Buzzard Ben!" called out a voice, and the figure of Silver Steve leaned forward and those who looked saw a six-shooter in his hand and his eyes fastened on the Buzzard.

With a curse which he could not keep back, Ben stopped and looked over his shoulder at the long-haired sport.

The two stood face to face in the light of the bar-room.

They were handsome specimens of manhood, each six feet in his boots and the best known characters of Moonstone.

"Is that man your pard?" demanded the Buzzard as he looked at Steve with eyes gleaming with passion.

"Not my pard, but he is entitled to some courtesy."

"Courtesy! Great Scott!" cried Ben, with a laugh. "I should gently remark. He's been my evil genius for months! When his one eye ain't looking on I have won every time, but when he is about I lose with a pertinacity that is provoking."

The Chinaman had stopped and was looking back at the two men, his champion and his enemy. He seemed to know why Buzzard Ben really hated him, but by no sign did he betray his real feelings, if he had any.

Silver Steve walked forward until he stood within arm's reach of the other.

"I want it distinctly understood in this camp that Wun Look is my friend—I won't call him pard. We have nothing in common with each other, for I don't like Chinamen too well myself; but, that one is my friend, I say."

A sneer curled the lip of the Buzzard beneath his drooping mustache.

In another moment the Celestial had vanished and there stepped into the bar-room and gaming-den a man who was, for all the world, the counterpart of the two whites in stature.

"Great Jehosaphat!" exclaimed Ben, looking at the new-comer, whose garments showed signs of late travel among the hills.

"Good-night, gentlemen!" saluted this individual, doffing his hat to the crowd, every member of which looked at him, and the gamblers suspended operations.

"I hope I don't intrude upon the seeming festivities of the occasion," he went on. "I am a poor man and a pilgrim on the face of the earth. I have left the abode of the Saints for a purpose, and though I may not remain with you long, I would not object to knowing more of you than I can perceive with the human eye."

"A Mormon, by Jupiter!" exclaimed the man behind the bar. "One of old Brig's apostles, an' from the way he looks, one of the seediest that ever crossed the threshold of the Tabernacle."

The tall, dark-skinned Mormon came forward until his eyes rested on the inviting rows of bottles back of the bar, and those who were watching him, and nearly every man was, thought they saw his mouth water.

"I lost the trail coming in and wandered about among the hills till I became bewildered," continued the Mormon. "I really don't know where I am now, but I seem to be in the presence of a lot of gentlemen, and if they will take something at my expense it will relieve my soul and perhaps do something toward linking us together in the great and universal brotherhood of man."

Within the memory of man a treat had never been refused by the average Moonstoner, and when the Mormon had spoken there was a general movement toward the bar.

Silver Steve fell back to let some more thirsty than he get to the counter, but all the time he studied the face of the Saint with more than usual interest.

He saw the darkish hand of the Mormon dive into the depths of a commodious pocket and fish up a lot of gold coin which he tossed upon the counter in a reckless manner, to have it scraped across the board by the hand of the bartender. There was a clinking of glasses and the men turning upon the tall Saint pledged him in the fiery stuff on sale in Moonstone and wished him a thousand years of life and usefulness.

"Gentlemen, I am Solomon Olds," he said, when the glasses had been set back and the tongs of the mountains had turned to him for whatever he cared to impart about his life's history. "I am on a peculiar mission. Not long ago the evil spirit entered the heart of one of the angels of my household and she vanished. I am on hunt of her and I have traveled over the hills in hopes of striking the trail of the runaway in order that I might take her back to the nest which she has deserted."

Silence fell upon the group of listeners.

Mormonism was not in very good odor at Moonstone. The toughs, for the most part, were American born, and the evils and wrongs of polygamy had incurred their hatred. Still, they had never interfered with it, being content to let the curse remain on its own ground, and so long as it kept within bounds they had agreed to let it run its natural course.

"Do you think she came this way?" asked Buzzard Ben.

"Really, I cannot say, but she was seen west of this place not many days ago and I thought—"

He stopped suddenly, for at that moment he caught sight of a face at the open door and a sudden start on his part drew the looks of all in that direction.

"It was that good-for-nothing heathen with the one orb," growled Ben, who had looked in time to see the face of Wun Look at the portal. "We don't like him any more than we do—"

He was about to say "Mormons," but checked himself out of respect for present company and went on:

"I mean I don't like heathen; I don't care who knows it, either, but this has nothing to do with your quest."

"Nothing, gentlemen," assured Mormon Sol. "I freely confess that my heart never pulsated warmly for the men of the land of Confucius. I don't like the slippery, slimy heathen—the money-getting, rat-eating pagans."

"Bully for you, Mormon Sol!" broke forth the Buzzard, springing forward and clutching the Saint's hand. "We could sail in the same boat and not fall out if our religious beliefs don't jibe very well. Will you accept of the hospitality of my shanty?"

Mormon Sol answered that he would, for the time, and the next moment he was walking off with Buzzard Ben, who led him down the straggling street of Moonstone and toward the cabin which he called home and which he occupied all alone.

The eye of Silver Steve followed the couple to the door and even beyond it. When they had vanished he himself went out and, crossing the street, drew up in front of the best house in Moonstone.

He went in without knocking and stood face to face with one of the most prominent men of the region, a person known far and wide as Diamond Don, the Sparkling Sport.

This man was not yet forty, though his very look told that he had seen a good deal of life. He sat at a table with some papers before him and when Silver Steve came in he looked up with a smile that brightened his face.

"You should have been down at Brushwood's," remarked the good-looking, long-haired sport. "We had some fun there. In the first place, Buzzard Ben had a notion to force Wun Look into an altercation and that little breeze had scarcely subsided ere a full-fledged Mormon Saint came in."

"A Mormon in Moonstone?" ejaculated Diamond Don, with a slight start.

"A regular Simon Pure Saint, fresh from Mormondom. He is tall and sour, a typical Saint, but now and then he smiles like a chameleon

and shows a pair of hands that would like to strangle the person he doesn't like."

"What brings him to Moonstone, Steve?"

"A lost wife."

"How, a lost wife? Has the old rascal been robbed, or has one of his women escaped from the modern harem that exists under Uncle Sam's banner?"

"He says she vanished all at once, some time ago, and he creates the impression that she just up and vamoosed, leaving him a lonely husband with not more than ten other wives to console him."

Another smile flitted over Don's fine face, and he said ere it vanished:

"I can't say that the Mormon will be a valuable acquisition to our population; but what do you think of him?"

"He's a snake in the grass and when he spat out his venom against all Chinamen, he was taken to Buzzard Ben's shanty and the two are hob-nobbing there now."

"Did Murad see him?"

"No, unless—"

"Silver Steve's sentence was not completed for all at once a wild cry fell upon their ears, and the next second something fell against the door of Diamond Don's house."

"That was a man!" cried the Sparkling Sport, springing up and rushing from the room.

In a moment the two had reached the door, and as it was opened the figure of Wun Look staggered in.

The yellow-man was caught in the strong arms of Silver Steve and carried, half dead, to the well-lighted room which he and Diamond Don had just left.

The face of the Chinaman was a mass of blood, and the white men thought at first that he had been cut. But, when water was brought and the blood washed away, a fearful discovery was made.

There was not a sign of sight in the face of the Celestial!

He had lost his only eye!

It had been torn from its socket, and while the startled men gazed at the ghastly spectacle, the Chinaman, with another spasm, twisted from Steve's grasp and fell yelling across the table.

CHAPTER II.

THE SPARKLING SPORT.

DIAMOND DON looked at the writhing man and then turned to his companion.

"There will have to be a change in that man's name," he said. "Hitherto it has been Wun Look, now it must be No Look."

"If he lives," answered Silver Steve.

"That Chinaman die? He has the grit of a dozen men!"

In less than half an hour from his sudden entrance, the Celestial had had his horrid wound dressed and was sitting in a chair with his bandaged face turned toward the two men who were listening to his brief story of the accident.

Wun Look did not know much about the catastrophe which had deprive him of his last eye. He said he had been attacked from behind, that, before he could see who his assailant was, he felt a finger twisting in the eye socket and when he ran off all was dark and he fell against a door.

"The man's hands were as soft as silk," said Wun Look whose language had grown somewhat American since his coming to the camp. "I had a hand on me long ago which felt just like that one, but it could not have been the same."

The Chinaman leaned forward and buried his burning face in his arms as they rested on the table and the two men looked at him in silence.

"Was it the hand of Murad?" asked Diamond Don, placing his own hand softly on the pagan's shoulder.

The head was raised, and if there had been eyes in it, they must have regarded the speaker with a good deal of astonishment.

"It was not the hand of the Mysterious. I know how it feels," he replied.

"Do you think it was Buzzard Ben's? You know what happened at the saloon."

Wun Look shook his head.

In another moment he arose and felt his way across the room. There was something cat-like in his movements, and when he reached the door he turned his sightless face toward Diamond Don and his companion and said:

"Wun Look will find that hand one of these days! He will put eyes into the ends of his fingers, and they will ferret out the hand that robbed him of his last eye. He will go back to his hut and wait till the pain goes away."

Silver Steve sprung to his side and took his arm.

"The same hand will find you again if you go home," he warned. "Come with me, Wun Look."

"No!" The Chinaman resolutely shook loose the hand that touched him, and turned the knob of the sport's door.

"You can go home to-morrow, urged Diamond Don, pulling him back. "You want rest, and it is here in my house."

Despite the remonstrance which the mutilated man put forth, he was not permitted to quit the

house, and before long was burying his feverish face in the pillows of a good bed, and clutching the bed-clothing as arrows of pain shot through his head.

"There is a mystery about this which must be cleared up. It is somewhat strange that the coming of Mormon Sol and the mutilating of the Chinaman should occur on the same night; but it may be only a coincidence."

It was Diamond Don who spoke, and the man who watched him smiled and twisted his long mustache playfully.

"You know, Steve, what Lady Jezebel said yesterday?" continued Diamond Don.

"About the long lane that always turns?"

"Yes."

"I never saw the woman cooler. She hates you with the same old passion, Diamond Don, so look out!"

"Claws beneath the velvet, eh?" laughed the handsome sport and mountain nabob. "I think I know Lady Jezebel pretty well. She keeps Amber under her wing like a jealous bird; but thoughts of that girl being her child don't grow on me very fast."

Silver Steve looked across the table at which they sat, and saw the eyes of Diamond Don glitter.

"You will let me say, I hope, that you are a strange man—a puzzle to every one in camp and to me, even," he smiled. "I have never bothered for the secret you carry in your bosom, for I regard it as your own property and none of my business. I don't know what keeps you here nor from whence you came. I do know that Moonstone is not the place for you; you seem to be other than Diamond Don—that name is not your own—but beyond this I have never guessed."

At this moment a cry of agony from up-stairs caused Diamond Don to look toward the door.

"He will have to let out a good many of those," said he, referring to the Chinaman. "He will have fever in that eye for weeks—"

"And a raging devil in his heart," put in Silver Steve. "I feel like going out and making some man pay for the loss of that little eye which half of Moonstone did not like."

"But you will do nothing of the kind. You will let the lane turn without interfering in the play against Wun Look."

"He knew something. His eye was likely to do some damage to some one, and he had to give it up on that account, don't you think so, Don?"

The Sparkling Sport nodded and seemed to listen for a repetition of the wail, which they had heard.

"You don't blame me for not telling you all I know, do you, Steve?" he suddenly asked, looking at the Silver Sport.

"Of course I don't. I have often wondered what brought you to Moonstone, but, as I have said, it was none of my business and I am willing to remain in the dark until—"

"Until I choose to reveal the secret, eh?"

"Yes."

Diamond Don was silent for a moment, but the man who could not help watching him thought he saw his countenance relax some of its secretiveness.

"It was ten years ago," began Diamond Don. "I came to this region—no, not exactly to this one—in search of a man who left a certain city on the seaboard between two days. I need not tell you more about him just now. I could not find him; the trail which started out so well was lost suddenly at a certain point and beyond that I saw nothing encouraging. For a while I was tempted to turn back and might have done so but for a singular accident which changed the whole tenor of my life."

Don got up and crossed the room. Silver Steve saw him at the door and opening it slowly and without noise he looked out into the hall where rose the stairs up which Wun Look had dragged his wretched body.

"I thought I heard the Celestial on the steps, but I guess not," observed Diamond Don, coming back and taking his own seat. "Where was I? I thought I would return to the East after losing the trail of the man I wanted, but something changed the whole tenor of my life. It was so singular that you shall hear the story. One afternoon I came upon the ruins of a group of shanties in the mountains. It was near the close of day, and I saw the sun leave me before I reached them. The whole lot had been fired, deliberately, as I could see, and there was nothing to tell by whom they had been inhabited. I was about to quit the spot, when from beneath the ruins of one of the shanties, as it were, came a human voice which was a prolonged cry for help. I could not see how any one could be alive beneath the ruins, but when I had cleared some of them away, I was rewarded by finding the opening of what appeared to be a deserted mine."

"I descended into the place and crept forward through a long corridor, into the chamber of horrors. On the floor of this room I came across the person who had given vent to the cry, but she was dead. Beneath the match I struck to relieve the gloom of the horrible spot, lay a woman, apparently thirty-five. She was handsome. There was a look of past refinement about her, but she was dressed after the man-

ner of miners' wives, and I took her to have borne the relation of wife to one of the tenants of the shanties. If I had reached her a minute sooner I should have found her alive, and perhaps able to tell me something about herself."

"There was nothing about her to give me any clue to her identity; but in searching the place I discovered that she had not been idle during her stay in what had turned out her tomb. On the wall, where it was comparatively smooth, I found some scrawling marks which had been traced with a stone harder than the surface. I made out the one sentence that stood before me—the last one on which the despairing creature had concentrated her thoughts. My match showed me these words on the dull stone: 'For God's sake find my child for me and avenge the crime of last night!' That was all, and these words have been before me ever since their discovery. I did not go back to my old den. I buried the woman in the mine, where I knew the wolves would not mutilate her, and when I went up to the starlight it was with a vow on my lips. From that moment my life was a changed one. I have been ever since the sworn avenger of the tragedy of the camp and the child-trailer of the West. You know me as Diamond Don. Know me so still. Let me be to you, to the toughs of Moonstone, and to Murad and Lady Jezebel, Diamond Don, the Sparkling Sport; but I know you cannot forget that beneath the mask I wear I am some one else."

Silver Steve, who had not lost a single word of the story, looked into the speaker's face, and thrust one of his hands across the table.

"I will keep the secret!" he exclaimed. "I will keep any secret you intrust to me. But, all along I have been of the opinion that you were a man with a mask. I will help you, Don. From this moment there are two avengers on the trail! The child, if living, shall be found, and the man who left the woman in the mine shall feel the hand of vengeance, no matter who he is, or by whom befriended."

Silver Steve stood erect before the Sparkling Sport, his face handsomer than ever, and coolness in his every look.

"There is nothing for me to live for but the righting of a wrong of this nature," he went on. "You don't know much about me, Don. Look here. I have never shown you this."

Silver Steve opened his shirt front and revealed his white skin to the gaze of the astonished Don.

Over his heart was a dark brand almost as large as a human hand, and Diamond Don leaned forward and gazed at it intently—evidently amazed.

"I did not know you were a marked man," he said, at length.

"There were two of us, and each is marked in this manner. We were twins, but, strange to say, never looked alike. We were caught once by a lot of desperadoes and branded with hot irons at the command of the captain of the band. The marks you see are letters; they are 'R. J.—Red Joachim.'"

"The name of the captain of the bandits?"

"Yes; the name of as vile a villain as ever drew in the breath of life."

"Where is he now?"

The eyes that looked at Diamond Don fairly flashed.

"Go out and ask the vultures that soar above the Dead Buttes," was the answer.

"Then, you and your brother hunted him down?"

"My brother? Don't let me think of the traitor!" cried Silver Steve.

The garments were pulled over the brand, and Silver Steve suddenly became his old self.

But, his words and the mark on his bosom had left a strange impression with Diamond Don, and when the Sparkling Sport asked him what they should do toward finding out who had mutilated the Chinaman, he started visibly and smiled.

"I've half a mind to let Wun Look work out his own revenge, for he will keep his words and put new eyes in his fingers. But, that is not it. Moonstone is to become the theater of startling events. This is the first act of a hidden hand. You know that we have one man among us who is a human puzzle."

"Murad?"

"Murad, the Mysterious. I have been watching him for months. He is more than man; he is half devil, and Lady Jezebel is the beautiful pantheress who calls Amber daughter. She has fingers of death and a mind of her own."

Five minutes later Diamond Don was alone in the house, and there crept from among the shadows beneath the window of the room where the two men had talked, a figure which made no noise when it glided off, but which rose to its feet some distance from the spot, and looking back at the home of the Sparkling Sport, broke out in a derisive laugh.

It was the person known throughout the mountain capital as "Lady Jezebel."

CHAPTER III.

THE MORMON'S CARD.

The next day the tall figure of Mormon Sol emerged from the shanty inhabited by Buzzard

Ben and stood for a little while in the roseate light of early morning.

Those who had seen him the previous night recognized him at once, and wondered if he would remain, or go off in search of the lost wife.

When the Mormon advanced down the street and bent his steps toward the saloon and gaming-den, he was followed by several thirsty men who thought he would repeat the treat of the night before, and give them another opportunity to wet their whistles.

Instead of doing so the Saint passed the den and kept on.

His figure was robed in black, which had seen hard times in Deseret and along the mountains. His neck was encircled by a dark cravat that almost choked him, and his hands he carried along his sides as if ready to grip something, not exactly a weapon of peace and good will.

Saint Sol did not stop until he reached a house that stood near the end of the somewhat rambling street, and as he looked up and took in the structure, a singular light was seen to glitter for a moment in his eye.

Advancing to the very steps of this house he knocked, and waited for results.

The door was opened, and he walked in as if it was not his first visit to the place.

Once inside, he found himself in a narrow hall which ran back into the shadows without showing him a single door.

"A strange house for him, if he is the man I think he is," muttered Mormon Sol.

A door at one side of the corridor opened at this and he saw a face there.

"Come on!" was spoken, and the Saint advanced and entered a room.

"You?" cried the man who confronted him.

"I thought so," was all the Mormon answered, and then he gazed at the other and seemed to study the face.

"What brought you to Moonstone?" was asked.

"A lost wife."

"Lost one of your flock, eh?" and there was the semblance of a laugh.

"Which one got away from you?—what number, I mean?"

"It was Thirza, or Number Six."

"Jerusalem! how many have you?"

"Nine."

"Have you held all but one?"

"All but the fairest and most impish of the lot."

The man looked at Sol a full minute without speaking.

"What made you seek me out?" he asked, at last.

The dark face of the Saint broke out in a smile.

"I think you ought to know," he responded.

"You haven't forgotten—"

"Come, I don't want any of the past raked up. You don't want to refer to anything that has been buried. I won't have it. I think it best that you continue on as Buzzard Ben's guest and that we remain apart and seem as strangers to the people of Moonstone."

The Saint's hands were seen to shut tightly and he gave Murad, the Mysterious, a look that had the penetrating powers of an arrow.

"You want me to go away; is that what you mean?"

"Not exactly; but I think I made my words clear enough. We needn't meet face to face. Your wife isn't here; I guess you know this, already; therefore I don't see any need of your remaining in Moonstone."

The Mormon came closer.

"I have been a Mormon almost ever since we parted company the night of the eventful 10th of March. I went over the mountains to Salt Lake and discovered that they stood in need of a man of my qualifications, and I wasn't long striking a bargain with Brigham Young. I was needed for certain work and having done it to the satisfaction of my employer, I was induced to stay and become a Saint. You see what I am now—that I made a pretty good Mormon; but, hang it all, I am getting tired of the whole business."

"But you are rich?"

"Where is there a poor Saint who is on 'the inside?' " grinned Sol. "Yes, I struck it rich in more ways than one, and to-day am among the richest Saints in Utah. But, as I have said, I am tired of this life. If I find Thirza I think I shall abandon it and go at something else. How have you fared since?"

"You can see."

"You are called Murad, the Mysterious; I know that. I heard of you before I struck Moonstone, but I didn't dream that you were—"

The Mormon paused and left the sentence unfinished.

"You really want me to go away, do you?" he asked, after a brief silence.

"Yes."

"There was a time when you wouldn't have driven me off for love or money. But, maybe you don't like Mormons."

The tones were sarcastic and the eyes of the speaker were full of derision.

"Did you blind the Celestial last night?" suddenly asked Murad.

"What's that?"

"Did you pounce upon Wun Look and rob him of his only eye?" I asked.

"I'm no harpy," said Mormon Sol. "I don't run about depriving people of their eyes."

"Well, some one swooped down upon the Jonah of Moonstone and stole the only eye he had."

Murad laughed.

"Did you think I did it?" cried Mormon Sol.

"I didn't accuse you, did I?"

"Not exactly. What sort of man was the Chinaman?"

"A little devil with an eye that had the seeing powers of a dozen."

"We once knew a Chinaman who, when we went to hang him, slipped through our fingers like an eel and who afterward as we thought killed three men. Have you forgotten him?"

"I forget nothing. But this man wasn't that one. Wun Look was a spying, sneaking man who seemed to hold a potent sway over the cards, so much so that whenever he was present at a game, certain men always lost, while others won hand over fist. They hated him on that account—those who lost did."

"Then, let him go to one of them for his eye."

Murad, the Mysterious, whose past life had been as a sealed book to the men of Moonstone, looked toward the door. He had caught the sounds of footsteps outside in the hall, and was about to request Mormon Sol to retire when the portal opened and the figure of a woman appeared.

She fell back at sight of the tall form of the Mormon, and their eyes met.

"Lady Jezebel, this is Mormon Sol—a gentleman of the new dispensation who came in last night on the lookout for one of his wives who some time ago took a notion to desert the nest."

Lady Jezebel, whose face was of southern cast, and whose hands were long and yellow, looked at Mormon Sol with eyes that seemed to read his very thoughts.

"You are looking for a wife, are you? Why don't you go back and set free the human slaves you have now in durance?"

The face before her seemed to darken.

"You are sarcastic. You don't care for the proprieties of the occasion. In other words, you are reckless, Lady Jezebel, as they call you, and—"

"As they call me? What do you mean?" and the woman sprung forward, and before either man could interfere she had seized the astonished Saint by the collar, and had forced him against the wall where she held him with the strength of a giantess.

Murad could not help smiling at the Mormon's predicament. He saw him held against the wall with the glowing eyes of Lady Jezebel burning in his face, and he noticed that the hands of the woman were lost beneath the clerical cravat.

Mormon Sol, however, suddenly twisted himself from the grip that held him in thrall and broke across the room.

As if not through with him, Lady Jezebel turned about, but met the suddenly-lifted muzzle of a six-shooter.

"You're a pretty Saint, you are!" she cried, checked by the weapon. "I have no doubt you would shoot a woman."

"Not a woman, but a tigress any time!" was the answer.

The tableau was exciting and dangerous. The revolver covering the face of Lady Jezebel was not three feet away and the dark finger of Mormon Sol seemed to tremble at the trigger.

"We can't live in this camp—not at the same time," said the woman facing him with the coolness of a pantheress. "I know more about you than you think. You are Mormon Sol; you are looking for a runaway wife. Do you expect to find her? Do you hope to take her back to Mormonism?"

"Why not?"

"You miserable wretch—man without mercy or the semblance of a human soul—if you attempt to take the woman you want from me I will see that the vultures of the San Juan feast on your flesh!"

What meant her words? What did she mean when she said "if you attempt to take her from me?"

"You don't seem to understand me," continued Lady Jezebel. "I know where Thirza the hunted wife is at this very moment. I have her under my care and the moment you attempt to overrule me and take her back, that moment the church will lose one of its pillars and the birds of the air will have a banquet."

"Where did you come across her?"

"Never mind. You don't more than half believe me. She is tall and slender; her face is pretty, despite the life she has lived with you. On her wrist is a circlet of gold which was welded there the day you espoused her after the rites of the Church."

"My God! you have her sure enough."

"That I have and I intend to keep her in my hands."

Mormon Sol's look grew darker than ever and he seemed to grind his heel into the floor in determination.

"You expect me to quit Moonstone and let the bloodless victory remain in your hands," he went on. "You don't know Mormon Sol.

You have yet to learn something about the man who has crossed mountains for the runaway wife of his bosom. I stay here until I have recovered her, or until somebody knows that the Saint of the Church is not powerless, though his only ally is himself."

"What do you say, Murad?" and Lady Jezebel turned upon the Mysterious who had not spoken for some time.

The immobile face of the Man of Mystery did not change, but the hand of Mormon Sol suddenly covered it.

"It matters not what he says!" he exclaimed.

"I know him, and he knows me. Let Murad, the Mysterious, lift his hand to thwart the will of Mormon Sol, and there will come a day of reckoning."

CHAPTER IV.

WUN LOOK, THE SIGHTLESS.

MURAD, the Mysterious, did not speak, but looked from the Mormon to Lady Jezebel, who stood beyond the table waiting for him to open his mouth.

"This man has already cowed you," she said, at last. "He has shut you up like an oyster."

A grim smile of confirmation passed over the face between the two, and Mormon Sol looked at Murad.

"I repeat my words. Let that man cross my will, and there will come a day of reckoning!" he said.

"He holds a secret, does he?" said Lady Jezebel. "This off-scouring of wickedness from Mormonism holds you in his hand and threatens you among your friends and adherents?"

"He knows what I know, and the moment he attempts to back you up in the game you are playing against me, that moment this camp will know more than it does now."

The figure of the Saint seemed to increase in stature and, still looking at the pair, he walked to the door and turned there for the last threat.

"I give you three hours," he continued, fixing his eyes upon the woman. "I give you just three hours. If at the end of that time I am not in possession of the woman who is under your protection, I will play a hand such as never was played in this camp."

Murad seemed on the eve of saying something, but the hand of the woman was thrown up, and with no color on her cheeks she stepped toward the man at the door, and deliberately smote him in the face.

"That is my answer, reptile!" she cried, falling back, while the face of the Mormon seemed to blaze. "That is the answer and defiance of Lady Jezebel. Now, go out yonder and do your worst. There is war between us—war to the knife, and the moment you play your hand you may find it trumped by the deadliest card you ever saw on the table of fate. Go!"

That was all.

Lady Jezebel turned to Murad as if nothing startling had happened, and, left to himself, Mormon Sol gave her a look of hatred and vanished.

The occupants of the chamber heard him for a moment in the hall, and then the front door opened and shut.

The Mormon was gone and the war had begun. There was no doubt of this, for his last look had told as much, and when the woman glanced from the house and saw him advancing across the Square she smiled as if she would have hastened the day of their next encounter.

"Where did you find this woman?" asked Murad of Lady Jezebel.

"She presented herself at my door night before last."

"And you took her in?"

"Yes. One look at her was enough to confirm her story."

"And Amber?"

"The girl was asleep at the time and knows nothing of my charge."

"Where is Thirza?"

"No, I won't reveal her hiding-place, not even to you," was the answer.

"Very well; keep it to yourself, then. But you may have to give her up."

"To that man?" and Lady Jezebel glanced from the room. "I will see that he never touches her. I am pledged to that. But he knows you."

The hands of Murad, the Mysterious, suddenly shut.

"He must have known you years ago for you have had nothing to do with Mormons lately."

No answer.

"Well, I am able to fight this man. You may be in his power in a certain sense, but I am not."

She gave him a last look and crossed the room.

"One moment!" cried Murad. "Who robbed the Chinaman of his eye?"

"How should I know?" and Jezebel turned upon him so suddenly that he fell back and glared at her like a devil.

"You knew it was lost?"

"I saw the Celestial out awhile ago. He was standing in the sunlight with his yellow face lifted heavenward and his little hands with the long nails clinched as if in bitter agony. It was cruel,

to say the least, and though I had no friendship for the spy and sneaking rat-eater, I could not help sympathizing with the poor wretch. He is blind now. It was the only eye he had."

Murad seemed to smile and while the look lingered Lady Jezebel left him alone.

She went home.

Once inside her door she stopped and looked at a beautiful girl standing at the table holding in her hand a revolver and looking pale but resolute.

"What has happened?" cried Lady Jezebel.

"That insulting Mormon has been here."

"Mormon Sol?"

"The man who is looking for his wife," answered Amber. "He came upon me a moment ago like a whirlwind and if I had not covered him with the revolver, there is no telling what might not have happened. He is a fury in black and though he calls himself Saint he is a double devil."

"What did he say?"

"He demanded to know what had become of his wife, and when I told him I knew nothing of the runaway he said I lied, for you had no secrets which I do not share, and that, as you had the woman under your protection, I—"

"Did he go that far?" broke in Lady Jezebel. "Did he tell you, Amber, that I have Thirza, as he calls her, under my protection?"

"He said that!"

Lady Jezebel was silent for a moment, but she had the gaze of the girl fastened upon her and the eyes seemed to look her through.

"Where is the wife?" asked Amber. "You need not fear to share that sort of secret with me for I hate those Mormons."

The woman went forward and stopped in front of the anxious girl, who, while called her child, bore but little resemblance to her.

"I thought you need not know, and I do not see fit at this time to impart the information. This man will do all in his power to retake the lost wife. I cannot tell you what I have heard from the lips of Thirza; but if the half of her tale is true, she should not go back to Mormonism."

"Keep the secret, then," said Amber with a look of sadness which lingered some time on her beautiful face. "We have not seen the last of this man."

"I hope not."

The girl turned away and left Lady Jezebel to her thoughts.

Suddenly there came to the ears of mother and daughter a cry that took them to the window, and looking out they saw standing before the house the blind Celestial.

Wun Look had groped his way to the spot, and was standing in the sunlight with the bandage over his eyeless socket, and his figure drawn up partly in the agony of the moment.

"My God! the man is mad," cried Amber. "Look how he sways, and shuts his long yellow hands as if they had the stealer of his eye in their grip!"

Lady Jezebel looked, but said nothing. Standing beside Amber she watched the Chinaman, and when he came toward the house she ran to the door and laid her hand on the latch.

"He sha'n't come in here," she said, resolutely. "We don't want the sightless heathen among us."

A hand, unseen, seemed to guide Wun Look to the door as straight as if he had not been despoiled of his eyes.

Amber looked on breathless and white faced. "Keep him out!" cried Lady Jezebel. "Keep that yellow pagan beyond this door!"

"In God's name, what makes you fear him? He has ever been kind to me, bringing me flowers from the mountain, and keeping them fresh in my window all last summer."

"What if he did? I don't care if he brought you roses from paradise; he sha'n't cross this threshold."

The rage and resolution of Lady Jezebel were something terrible to behold. She fairly quivered with passion, and holding fast to the latch she showed that she was determined to keep the blind pagan on the outside.

Meanwhile Wun Look was near the door, his groping hands put forth to guide him, and all at once he touched the portal and uttered a loud cry.

He seemed to know where he was, for he uttered the name of Amber, and then beat the door with his fists.

"Let me speak to him," said the girl, gently, laying her hand on Lady Jezebel's arm. "Let me assure Wun Look that he has at least one friend in Moonstone."

The look she received from the woman at the latch was dark and menacing.

"What! make yourself a marked person for your sympathy for a pagan?" Lady Jezebel exclaimed. "You don't mean that, Amber?"

"I do," and tearing the woman's hand from the door, she opened it and drew the Chinaman inside.

The poor wretch gave utterance to a wail of agony which was changed to a cry of joy when he heard Amber's voice. He stopped and threw out his yellow hand and touched the girl's face.

"Wun Look is not friendless, though they have stolen his eyes. You are Amber—Amber"

the beautiful and the good. You did not steal Wun Look's sight. No, your heart is too pure for a theft of that kind. I bless every one in this house."

The look he received from the silent, dark-faced Lady Jezebel was malignant in the extreme.

She suddenly threw out her hand and tearing the Chinaman from Amber's wrist, forced him to the door and threw him across the step.

This brought a sharp remonstrance from Amber, but Lady Jezebel silenced her with a look, and the next moment the door had closed in the Celestial's face.

Wun Look picked himself up in the dust of the street and for a moment stood undecided in front of the house.

"That hand! that infamous hand! I have felt it before," he cried. "It is like the paw of the tiger, soft, but deadly. It can smooth and kill at the same time. That was not the hand of the girl; no, it was the grip of Lady Jezebel, the woman who long ago made a silken noose and with it—"

The rest of the sentence was not heard by Amber, who, seeing that Lady Jezebel was about to throw wide the door and spring out, tiger-like, upon the Chinaman, threw herself forward and pressed her back with a strength which she did not believe she had.

"Let me out at the yellow liar of the Flowery Kingdom!" cried the woman, struggling in the hands of the girl. "Let me show him that I will not be insulted, not even by a blind wretch with a colored skin."

Amber, resolute to the last, held on and would not let Lady Jezebel break her hold.

When at last she fell back, she looked out of the window, but the man was gone, and when Lady Jezebel, with the old feeling tugging at her heart, opened the door, she caught a fading glimpse of him as he groped his way back to his cheerless abode.

What did Amber think?

When she looked once more at the woman who came back to the house, and saw in her eyes the wild glare which she had seen in the orbs of a wounded mountain lion, she knew that the war between Lady Jezebel and the blind Chinaman had just begun.

But the queen of Moonstone said nothing; she had bitten her lips through, but she was cool.

CHAPTER V.

ORDERED OUT OF CAMP.

MORMON SOL went back to Buzzard Ben's shanty after his encounter with Lady Jezebel at Murad's house.

He had given her three hours in which to produce his lost wife, Thirza, but he did not think that she would do so. He knew there was to be war to the knife between them, and when he entered Buzzard Ben's hut and caught the eye of that worthy, he dropped into a chair and asked how many tigresses they had in Moonstone.

"I've just seen one," said the Mormon, with a grin. "She has all the attributes of the striped terror of the jungle."

"Then, you've seen Lady Jezebel," was the answer. "You must have smoothed the fur the wrong way, and—"

"I guess I did; anyhow she showed her teeth, and from this time on it is war between us unless she produces the woman I want."

"Thirza?"

"Thirza, the runaway."

"Did she say she knew where she was?"

"She boasted that the woman is under her protection."

"Then she will stay there unless Lady Jezebel changes her mind."

For a moment the face of the Mormon Saint seemed to grow darker than ever, but all at once he looked up and encountered the sport's gaze.

"Where did that woman come from?" he asked.

"The most of them here don't know," was the reply.

"But you do, eh, Buzzard Ben?"

The owner of the shanty looked out of the window a moment, and then came back to his guest.

"She came from the South—that is, she used to live on the Rio Tagus; but she's been here for years."

"On the Rio Tagus," echoed the Mormon, with a start. "Do you know anything about her life there?"

"Not much, but it is natural to suppose that she showed her claws there, as she seems to be showin' 'em here."

Mormon Sol arose and crossed the room to the door. There was a singular light in his eye, and with his hand on the latch he stood there, and appeared to be recalling something.

"When did she come to Moonstone?—tell me exactly, if you can," he said, turning to Buzzard Ben.

"He thinks he has a clew, that's it. He has an idea that he has seen Lady Jezebel before, and maybe he has," thought Ben before he spoke. "I don't doubt it much," and then he said, aloud:

"She landed here just a week after I came, and that was six years ago this very month. We had Murad here already, and Lady Jezebel, with Amber, her daughter, were the only females in camp."

"The girl was with her, was she?"

"Yes. I remember seeing the two the night they came. I guess I was the first man to see them. They came in from the south, and seemed to be alone. They got lodging at Murad's; he turned himself out o' doors to accommodate them, and they stayed there until they got a house of their own, where they have been ever since."

"Did Murad seem to know her?"

"I can't say. You don't know what to make of that man. He is the livin' mystery of Moonstone and we don't know anything about him."

"It's queer, don't you think, Ben?"

Buzzard Ben elevated his head and looked away.

"There's a good many queer things in this camp," said he. "You haven't seen Diamond Don yet?"

"Who's Diamond Don?"

"The Sparkling Sport—the handsome man who will some day be nabob, an' sport his diamonds on every occasion. He's got the ways of a Yankee about him—I know something of the critter myself, having been East—but he's losin' them pretty fast and in time he'll be a typical desperado so far as he can and still be Diamond Don, the Sparkler."

"I don't think I've seen Diamond Don," said the Mormon with a good deal of curiosity in his tones. "The man who took the Chinaman's part last night was—"

"Silver Steve. The two aren't exactly pards, but he stands by the pagan an' I could have got into a rumpus with him over the rat-eater, but didn't want to."

Mormon Sol came back from the door with a curious smile on his leathery face.

"I've given that woman, Lady Jezebel, three hours in which to turn my wife over to me," he remarked.

"But you don't think she'll pay the least attention to it, do you?"

"I hardly think she will, but I told her that if she did not comply with the demand I would play a hand, the like of which was never seen in Moonstone."

"You? You play a hand here alone whar you are a stranger?" and Buzzard Ben's eyes dilated and he looked amazed at the man who had spoken. "You can't do anything here. You ought to have a grip on Murad before you amount to a hill of beans."

"I've got that," exclaimed the Saint, bending over Buzzard Ben and clutching his sleeve. "I've got a death grip on the Mysterious. I know him."

"Then, by Jove! you know more than any one in the city does. You got a grip on Murad, the Mysterious? Look me in the eye and say that again, will you?"

Mormon Sol looked at Buzzard Ben and smiled. Then he seemed to retreat within himself, like the head of a turtle into its shell; but the next moment he came out and laughed.

"A man can be a Mormon and have a good grip on some people who are not," he went on. "I don't know what Murad thinks of me, but he may discover that, being a Saint, don't interfere with my being somebody else."

"Well, I'm anxious to see what Lady Jezebel will do with your three hours of grace," said the unlucky gambler.

"We shall see."

At this moment the gaze of Buzzard Ben, wandering from the shanty, alighted on a man who came down the opposite side of the straggling street and suddenly catching the Mormon's arm, he pointed toward him.

"There's Diamond Don now!" he cried.

The man from Mormondom sprang forward and halted at the little window alongside the door. From this point he fixed his eyes on the Sparkling Sport, and seemed to study him, while in turn he himself was eyed like a hawk by Buzzard Ben.

Diamond Don, unconscious of this espionage, walked on and entered Brushwood's, his form vanishing from sight beyond the always open door.

Not until the Sparkling Sport had disappeared did Mormon Sol turn away, and then with a reluctance which Buzzard Ben noticed and remembered.

"So that is the man you call Diamond Don?" said Sol. "Where did he come from?"

"From the East."

"When?"

"Months ago—I can't tell you just when."

"Before Murad came?"

"No."

"After Lady Jezebel settled in Moonstone?"

"Yes, after that event."

The Mormon relapsed into silence, during which he drew from under his black coat a watch, which he consulted, while a smile crossed the face of Buzzard Ben.

"Are you counting the minutes?" he asked, t'egrin still on his face.

"Not exactly," was the answer. "The three

hours will go by without anything startling. I would like to know where Lady Jezebel has concealed Thirza, and what motive she could have for hiding her, a perfect stranger to her, and, besides, a Mormon."

"Lady Jezebel is a strange woman. The mother of Amber—"

Mormon Sol turned upon the speaker so suddenly that the sentence was broken.

"Where is Amber's father?" he asked.

"There you have me. Lady Jezebel, as I understand the situation, is a widow, and the girl she has with her was an only child."

"Well?"

Buzzard Ben said nothing, but ran his hand through his reddish beard.

"A widow, a girl, Diamond Don and Murad, the Mysterious. There's plot enough here for a play," he heard the Mormon murmur.

Then the tall, dark figure of the man from Utah went toward the door, and Ben watched him to see if he would go out. Outside the sun was shining, and the streets of Moonstone had few shadows.

Wun Look perhaps was nursing his blindness in the solitude of his little shanty and the gamblers were at the tables at Brushwood's.

Mormon Sol opened the door and stepped out.

"I'll look around," he said, glancing back over his shoulder at the man left behind, and Buzzard Ben saw him walk down the street and vanish somewhere toward the small Plaza.

"Guess I'll go down to Brushwood's myself," and Ben picked up his hat and left the shanty.

He entered the saloon and found there the usual day crowd. The tables were pretty well filled and the gamblers were busy. He walked to the counter and being seen at once by the bar-keeper, was questioned as to his guest.

"Oh, Mormon Sol isn't going to hurt any one if he's let alone," said Buzzard Ben. "He's lookin' for a runaway wife who had it good where she was, an' I don't care how soon he finds her, either. What will I take this mornin', Brushy? A little Tiger-Claw?"

An odd-looking bottle was placed before Buzzard Ben and he, was in the act of pouring out his usual potion when he was touched and turning suddenly, he looked into the face of Diamond Don.

The Sparkling Sport was standing at his elbow, and as their eyes met the handsome sport said:

"They tell me you have a guest, Buzzard—that you have taken to your shanty, a real, genuine Mormon with all the the tail feathers and plumes."

"That's layin' it on rather thick, but I've seen no tail feathers about Mormon Sol," answered Buzzard Ben.

"What does the old fellow say?"

The man with the reddish beard was becoming irritated.

"Maybe you'd better ask him," he said, with tartness, and just then the man behind the bar cried out that the opportunity for doing so had just come.

Diamond Don looked toward the door and saw therein the form of the very man after whom he had asked, for Mormon Sol had entered the place and was coming toward them.

There was a silkiness in the Mormon's steps that suggested the tiger, but he looked meek enough to disarm suspicion and as he came on, with the eyes of Diamond Don fastened upon him, he looked everything but dangerous.

"Here, Mr. Olds—here is the gentleman I spoke about. This is Diamond Don, the Sparkling Sport of Moonstone," and Buzzard Ben with these introductory remarks waved his hand toward the sport and looked at his drink.

The Mormon had stopped and was extending his hand to the Sparkling Sport. The gaze of the two had met and they were standing face to face with a good many eyes fixed upon them.

Diamond Don said something of a pleasant nature and the Mormon replied in like strain, but those who looked closest thought they saw something beneath this apparent cordiality.

Buzzard Ben swallowed his drink and turned to the two men.

"Hope you'll get along, gents," said he. "I'm off, down to the Wildcat to see how the lead is running; haven't been there for a week, you must know."

All at once as Buzzard Ben turned on his heel, the Mormon looked toward the door and started.

Another man had come in. There he stood, looking at the scene before him, his figure drawn up, showing the breadth of chest and his athletic build, and it was he at whom the Mormon was looking with all eyes.

He had seen him before. But very few hours had passed since their first encounter the previous night in that very place, but now, with the light of day on him, Silver Steve seemed to have a different look, and when he came down the narrow aisle between the scattering tables for the sports of Moonstone, he was the best eyed man in the den.

He walked to where Mormon Sol stood, and the two found themselves face to face.

"So you are still in camp?" said Silver Steve.

"I am here to tell you to shake the dust of Moonstone from your feet and go away."

The words fell like a thunderbolt upon the ears of all.

The figure of Mormon Sol seemed to reel toward the counter, and his look became a sudden stare.

"Are you master here?" he stammered.

"I am not. I am simply Silver Steve, a high private in the ranks of mankind; but you must get out of this camp."

The hand of Silver Steve fell upon the Mormon's arm while he spoke, and he seemed to move closer to the disciple of polygamy.

"You don't like Mormons?" said the man from Utah.

"That's not it. I don't care a snap what you folks do; you will have to answer some day to a higher tribunal than any Uncle Sam has established. I only say that you can't remain in Moonstone."

The hand fell back and the Mormon looked into the stern, unexcitable face of its owner.

"You are not Murad," he said. "You have no authority here. You order me around as if you—"

"You won't go, eh? You prefer to remain and take what comes. You want me to go on, do you? God helping me, I will tell the truth if you persist in staying."

"Tell it."

The lips of the Mormon curled haughtily.

"Not now. Let me whisper a word in your ear."

The hand of Silver Steve drew the man toward him, and for a second his lips seemed glued to the Mormon's ear.

What he said no one heard, but when he released Mormon Sol, that worthy fell back, and with his eyes staring at Silver Steve, he quivered from head to foot and his face had the look of the dead.

CHAPTER VI.

MAN OR DEVIL?

EVERY eye in the place was riveted upon the man who had been so startled by the unheard words of Silver Steve.

Mormon Sol looked at the Branded Athlete, and, for a moment, seemed ready to dispute the truth of what he had said, but all at once he strode toward the open door as if about to take his departure.

"You hit that man hard," said Diamond Don to the sport. "You have been keeping one of his secrets. We shall see him no more."

But Mormon Sol stopped and was facing the crowd. He lifted his hand, and, with his gaze fixed on the man who had surprised him, he said in solemn tones:

"It is as false as Tartarus! I never saw you before. It is a lie."

A smile came to the face of Silver Steve and he seemed on the eve of laughing down the denial, but instead of doing so he covered the Saint with his hand and cried:

"Ask your inner conscience. Ask your soul if I have lied. Do you want proof?" and Steve laid his hand on his own bosom and stepped toward the Mormon.

"I want to see nothing," was the reply, and Mormon Sol made a move to shut off the sight about to be displayed to his gaze by the opening of the athlete's shirt. "I am not the man you have called me. I am Mormon Sol and nothing more."

He was at the door, and in another moment had crossed the step and was gone.

Buzzard Ben, near the door at the time of the Mormon's departure, caught his eye and followed him out.

"In God's name, when did that man come to Moonstone?" he exclaimed, clutching Ben's sleeve. "What is he doing here?"

"He came after all the rest were here and he isn't doing anything in particular."

"You don't like him, eh?"

"I never had a brotherly feeling for him, especially since he championed the cause of the Chinaman."

"Then, let us go back to your shanty, Buzzard Ben. I want to see you privately."

"Then, you aren't goin' as he ordered? You don't intend to let Silver Steve order you out of camp?"

Mormon Sol said nothing in reply, but led the way to Buzzard Ben's shanty and when he had closed the door behind him he turned on the man who had tramped thither at his heels and said:

"Now we are alone. You haven't been doing very well with the mine, I believe?"

"I'm the unluckiest man in Moonstone—never hit a good lead no matter where I dig. I'm the Lazarus of Moonstone in a certain way. An' all because that rascally Chinaman, the pard of Silver Steve, stands over the table and bewitches the cards with his one eye."

"But he'll not do that any more, eh, Buzzard Ben? The last eye is gone and he can't charm anything from this time on. You are unlucky, you say?"

"Born under an unlucky star, I guess."

Mormon Sol seemed to breathe hard which made Buzzard Ben the more anxious to know what Silver Steve had said to him.

"He won't tell me," muttered the miner.

"He heard something which he thought no livin'

soul knew an' the chances ar' that he won't give me a hint of what it was."

"You don't know much about Silver Steve, only that he came to Moonstone and is here today," he went on at last. "That man had the impudence to make one of the most infamous accusations I ever heard of. Is he strong here?"

"What?"

"Is he strong with the pards of Moonstone? Does he stand near to Murad, the Mysterious, who seems to hold the camp in the hollow of his hand?"

"No, he stands closer to Diamond Don."

"Are they friends?"

"They are friends."

The Mormon seemed to reflect a moment.

"I have another one to fight—I see that already," he said. "I am here for a double purpose. I am going to trust you, Buzzard Ben. We can pool our issues and strike it richer than any man in these diggings. You want money enough to be independent of the cards of Moonstone?"

"Who wouldn't like to be that way?" grinned the listener.

The door was shut, but before he spoke again Mormon Sol went to it and made sure that it was latched and that no one was within ear-shot of the shanty.

There was a strange gleam in his eyes when he glided back across the floor and sat down on the stool near the man calmly waiting for him to go on.

Then, opening his coat far enough to run one of his dark hands beneath it, he drew out a package which he carefully unwrapped in Buzzard Ben's presence.

When he had opened the package he displayed a bit of silk well oiled which he undid in turn and laid it on his knees. There now appeared a thin object which he took up and looked at with eyes that fairly glittered.

"We can become the twin nabobs of Moonstone if we play the right sort of hand and play it well," he said, looking up and catching Buzzard Ben's gaze. "It will take some work and a good deal of coolness, but were I to select the man I think would help me most, I would choose you. There is coolness and caution in your heart and that is just what we want. In this package lies the secret that will make us the moguls of the West. We need not look further for the bottomless bonanza; we have but to lift our hands and play our cards well and the prize is ours."

All this time Buzzard Ben was looking on, watching the brown fingers as they provokingly toyed with the oiled-silk wrappings of the parcel, and inwardly he was wondering if the man was mad or a dreamer.

When the hands of Mormon Sol opened the flat object and spread out on his lap three papers and a picture, the bearded face of Buzzard Ben was thrust forward and his eyes became fixed on the lot.

"I have carried these things a long time," said the Mormon. "I have guarded them as I would guard my life. They are worth their weight in diamonds and there are people who would buy them at that rate."

"That's a woman's picture, ain't it?" queried Ben.

"Yes, a woman's face. See if you know it."

The old picture was handed to the sport miner and his bronzed fingers held it close to his eyes.

"It looks a little like her, by Jove! it does."

"A little like whom?"

"Lady Jezebel."

"Where is the resemblance strongest?"

"In the eyes. Can't you see they look much like hers? You saw her last night?"

Mormon Sol said nothing, but let Buzzard Ben study the picture to his heart's content, after which he handed it back, looking at the papers that had been its companions.

"She was pretty then," said the Mormon, his own eyes falling upon the photograph.

"The devil? ain't she good looking now?"

"Yes, but you should have seen her before she came to Moonstone."

"She must have been a beauty in her younger days."

"She was a seraph, but a seraph as dangerous as a wildcat."

"You knew her then?"

The Mormon started.

"I knew her," he said, deliberately. "I knew this creature who now poses as Lady Jezebel, not wrongly named, I must confess."

Buzzard Ben waited for him to go on, but as he showed no signs of doing so, he went at it once more.

"Did she seem to recognize you last night?"

"Not wholly so, though she told me something that made me suspicious. Do you know what relation she bears to Murad, the Mysterious?"

"To Murad? No."

"I thought not. I guess not one in camp knows but myself. Buzzard Ben, I could drop a bomb-shell among you all, and there'd be some tall talking at Brushwood's. Let me tell you. Lady Jezebel is Murad's wife."

Buzzard Ben nearly fell from the stool, and for several moments he stared at Mormon like a man in a maze.

"His—wife?" he cried.

"His wife."

"I can't believe that."

"Why not?"

"They are seldom together. Lady Jezebel and Amber live in a house of their own, and I have watched her often. True she goes to Murad's now and then, but the idea of her being his lawful wife—that stumps me."

"I thought it would. I know what effect it would have on the rest of the pards of Moonstone, but we can keep it to ourselves till we are ready to explode the bomb. As surely as I look you in the face, those parties are man and wife."

"Then Murad is Amber's father?"

There was no reply.

"That would startle the camp, sure enough," said Ben. "Murad, the Mysterious, the father of Amber, and the husband of Lady Jezebel!"

Mormon Sol seemed to take great delight in watching the play of light and shadow on Buzzard Ben's face. He thought he could surprise him, and he had done so; but another surprise equally as great was at hand.

He took the photograph from Buzzard Ben's hand and handed him one of the papers.

"We are one in many things now, so there need be no secrets between us," he remarked.

"Cast your eyes over that document, and don't think that I have no trumps in my hands if I am a Mormon in a Mormon-hating land."

Buzzard Ben took the paper and leaned toward the light. He looked at the document which was brown, and covered with writing which he had to decipher by degrees.

"Are you man or devil?" he suddenly cried, lifting his eyes and catching the Mormon's look.

"Both!" was the sententious answer. "I am both man and devil. I am Mormon Sol and more. I have in my hands the best cards in any deck. I hold the key that unlocks to me, and the man I shall choose as my helper, the riches of the Mysterious. I can say to this Murad, the Unknown: 'Stand aside and let me get into your shoes,' and he will get out of my way. Didn't I break the force of his hand last night? When Jezebel, his own wife, appealed to him for assistance, I raised my hand and he did not help her. He knows something of what I can do, but he shall know more. I want a little help. I have selected you—you, Buzzard Ben. It will be share and share alike, and when I go back to Mormondom—ha! ha! maybe I won't go back—you will be master here, as Murad, the Mysterious, is now."

A silence fell over the last words.

The two men looked at one another, and seemed to read the inner thoughts of each.

"What say you? Shall it be alliance or war?" asked the Mormon.

"It shall not be war. I want to make a stake—I want to be a mogul before I die."

"Brave man. I can make you more than mogul. I can make you the richest pard west of the Mississippi. The future of more than one person rests with the despised follower of the Prophet. They call me Mormon Sol and such I am; but they don't know what I can be—they don't dream that I carry in my bosom the documents that can destroy the brightest dreams ever cherished, and that I hold in my hand a weapon which can beat down those lifted against me by my foes. As to the man who whispered at my ear a while ago—we will crush him like that!" and Mormon Sol suddenly opened and shut his hand.

His white teeth gleamed for a moment between his parted lips, and his dark hands buttoned over his breast the coat from beneath which he had taken the picture and the papers; then he stood erect, letting Buzzard Ben look at him from the ground up.

He had the figure of a giant when he stood thus, and when the man on the stool took in his physique, he could not help saying to himself:

"He and Silver Steve are a little alike physically. They have the same turn of shoulder and their eyes are alike. Put Sol's bat on Steve and let him muster in Mormon duds, and he'd make a good disciple of old Brigham himself."

Buzzard Ben's soliloquies were cut short by a sudden movement on the Mormon's part, and the next moment the smooth face was almost touching his cheek.

"Remember, we are sworn pards from this time on. Our cause must be guarded and fought for if necessary. I have an idea there will have to be some hot work before the game is played out; but you know the trigger, Buzzard Ben?"

"In Heaven's name! who and what is this man?" ejaculated the miner sport.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MAN OUTSIDE.

STANDING in the dark, though to others there was light enough, Wun Look the Celestial had his face turned toward a man who sat at a table in a well lighted room.

It was night again and the stars were out, brightening the vault of heaven and ever and anon down the mountain came to all ears the roar of the mountain lion and the fierce barkings of a pack of wolves.

Wun Look had entered Diamond Don's house

and it was the Sparkling Sport whom he confronted with the bandage over his feverish eye and his long, yellow fingers playing with the thread of the cloth that covered the stand.

The blind Chinaman had groped his way to the house of his friend, he had entered without knocking, for there the hand of kindness found him after the horrid theft of the eye and from it he had gone back to his own shanty never again to see the broad light of day.

Diamond Don and Wun Look were the only occupants of the chamber and the Chinaman had been talking.

"Somehow or other I felt a nameless thrill when her hand seized me in Amber's house," said Wun Look. "I can't tell you how it went through me as if a knife had penetrated to my vitals. Years ago I felt a hand like that one."

"When you lost your first eye?"

The Chinaman nodded.

"Murad, the Mysterious, says he was sorry to hear of your loss," said Diamond Don, watching the face before him.

"But he did not come to me to say so," put in the blind man. "He never came to my shanty to offer his sympathies. He stayed away and said that, if he said it at all."

"He told Amber so."

"You have seen the girl? You have talked with Amber, the Beautiful?"

"I have seen her and talked with her. She is your friend, Wun Look."

The Celestial clasped his yellow hands and his lips parted as if heaping blessings upon the girl's head, but he said nothing.

"Let us go back now. You say that hand that threw you out of the house felt very familiar?"

"It sent a thrill through me."

"Do you think—no, you don't mean to say that the hand that robbed you of your eye might have been Lady Jezebel's?"

There was silence, and as Diamond Don looked at the man in the light of his lamp and saw his yellowish face contorted with pain, he could not help wondering what was passing in his mind.

"My God! if she is Amber's mother I would not think so for the world," said the Chinaman at last. "I would not think so for my own life. Amber! She was the sunshine of Wun Look's life for she had a smile for him and when I brought her flowers from the mountain she used to smile and thank me for what I had done."

"Wun Look, let us understand one another," said Diamond Don. "You saw the man who came to Moonstone from Mormondom? You saw Mormon Sol who is looking after a runaway wife?"

"I saw him."

"You have been to Utah. You told me once that for more than a year you lived among the Saints."

"I did."

"You saw them all?"

"All from Brigham down."

"And this man, too?"

The Chinaman leaned forward spasmodically and his teeth met in a crack.

"I saw him. I saw this man among his own. I watched him for six months. I was on his track wherever he went. He never left Salt Lake City without having Wun Look at his heels."

"Why were you playing spy on him?"

"I was under oath. I belonged then to a band of oath-bound men who had a grudge against a certain set of men who had murdered some of my people in the mountains and—"

"And you thought Mormon Sol belonged to the gang?"

"We knew it, Diamond Don. We knew them all and they knew that we knew it. One by one they died, one here, the others there. In the valleys of Mormondom they met their fate, and though a few were buried, the rest rotted for the vultures, and when I came away there were but two left."

"This man, Mormon Sol, was one of the two?"

"One of the two," repeated Wun Look.

"When we met last night, he in the saloon and I at the door, he seemed to know me at once. I do not say that it was his hand I felt as the knife gouged out my last eye. I only know that that hand was as soft as silk and that when it left me, I staggered from the spot blind for life."

The yellow man appeared to see despite the fact that no light would ever be his again. He stretched his hand across the table and clutched it in Diamond Don's presence.

"What are you going to do?" asked the Sparkling Sport.

"I am going to get even."

"But your eyes?"

"My hands will see!" quickly said the Chinaman. "They will serve me as well as my eyes have done. I will find the robber. I will feel his throat some day in my grasp!"

There was something terrific in the drawn visage of the man who uttered these words.

Diamond Don could not help but look at him as he leaned across the table, his white teeth

showing like ivories between his thin, but not sensual, lips. There was something about Wun Look's face which did not suggest the tigerish nature of his race—something which told of manliness beneath the skin he wore.

After a little silence the voice of Wun Look was again heard.

"Diamond Don, Mormon Sol is a man of mystery like Murad."

"How like Murad, Wun Look?"

"He came from the land toward the big sea in the East."

"Do you mean that he lived in the East at one time?"

"Yes; it was long before he became Mormon."

"What have you to prove this?"

"A letter which I once found in Salt Lake. I stole it from Mormon Sol, ha! ha!"

"You stole it, did you? What ever became of that letter?"

"I carried it with me wherever I went. I brought it to Moonstone with me."

"And you have it now?"

The voice of Diamond Don betrayed his eagerness.

"It is in my shanty where no one but myself can find it. Do you want to see it, Diamond Don?"

"I would like to."

"Wun Look will go and bring it."

"No, tell me where it is. You don't want to excite suspicion by groping down the street and, having found the letter, coming back to me. Tell me where it is and I will go after it."

Wun Look seemed to hesitate a moment, but he said:

"I will tell you, Diamond Don. Listen now."

Then he proceeded and described to the Sparkling Sport the interior of his shanty, at the end of which description the sport arose and went out.

Left alone, the sightless Celestial began to pace up and down the floor. He would stop and listen as a sound from without caught his ear, and now and then he would shut his hands and grate his teeth.

"Diamond Don will find the letter, Mormon Sol," he hissed. "I am parting with the secret at last. I am getting even with the last man of the Mormon Circle of Death."

Minutes passed, but Diamond Don did not come back. And hour waned and the pagan was the sole tenant of the chamber.

"Can't he find it?" he cried. "Or has some one robbed me of that letter? Did the thief come when I was asleep, or with the tread of the mountain cat did he invade my shanty during the day when I was in pain and deprive me of my weapon?"

He groped his way to the door and opened it.

The cool air blew against his face and the wind, reaching the bleeding socket, made him wince.

"I will see what keeps Diamond Don," he said under his breath. "I know the way to the shanty! If he is there and has not found the letter, I will find it for him."

Wun Look went down the steps of the Sparkler's house and struck the street. Half a dozen men saw him walking along with his ears on the alert and his hands raised before his face.

In front of the shanty he stopped as if he still had the gift of vision.

Turning toward the house, he went forward and reached the door.

"I have come myself, Diamond Don," he said, as he opened the door. "Can't you find the letter?"

There was no reply, and Wun Look felt his way across the room and put up his hand against the wall in one corner.

Presently he touched a button or something of the kind, for a bit of wood dropped out of the log and fell at his feet.

"It is not here!" he cried, feeling into an empty pocket in the wall. "Did Diamond Don find it?"

For a moment he stood there, his face the picture of mystery and despair, and when he turned away it was with tottering step.

"If he did not find it—if the other one did—I will get it back!" fell from his lips. "I will have that letter if I have to tear it from the dead hand of the thief."

Wun Look drew out from beneath the folds of his frock a knife with a long and crooked blade. It was a formidable-looking weapon, and as it lay along the yellow arm of the Chinaman it was terrible in its suggestiveness.

"I will find the man and the letter," he went on. "Though my eyes are gone, I will put new ones into my fingers, and I will find the thief and the prize."

He did not hear the step that came near the window. He did not catch the sound of the feet that drew near to the shanty and stopped near the door.

A face was pressed against the cob-webbed pane. A face was glued to the window for a moment, and a pair of eyes seemed to single out the Celestial as he drew his dark thumb across the edge of the knife and smiled with all the hideousness of crime.

"I see him. He is alone," said the man outside in a hoarse whisper. "I see the yellow tiger-cat. What a chance for me! I'll never

get another like it. Now or never. There are a thousand devils of danger in the Chinaman, blind as he is."

The hand of the speaker was put forth and he opened the door. He did this so carefully that the portal made no noise as it swung open.

All being dark to Wun Look, he saw nothing. He might have heard the footstep that crossed the threshold of his little shanty if he had not been busy testing the cutting qualities of the knife in his hand.

All at once he was pounced upon by a man who bore him to the wall and seemed to force his lithe body into the logs themselves.

Wun Look cried out, but the cry was stifled by a hand. He felt fingers of demonism at his throat; but still he struggled on.

Suddenly there was a cry which did not proceed from the man who held him in a grip of steel. There was a leap across the step, another man came in like a whirlwind, and Wun Look felt the hands torn from his waist and though they seemed to take a part of it with them.

"Just in time, I reckon," said a voice.

"Silver Steve!" gasped the blind pagan.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SHADOW OF A NOOSE.

THE Branded Athlete had come in the nick of time.

The man whom he caught looked daggers at him as he was dragged from his victim and as he went out the door, Silver Steve distinctly heard the grinding of teeth.

For a moment the Celestial stood against the log to which he had been pressed by his assailant and seemed to gasp for breath.

Presently he felt his way forward and caught the hand which touched his in the dark.

"Wun Look will not forget," he said. "You came in time to save him from the grip of the silken hand."

A smile passed over Silver Steve's face and he looked into the countenance before him.

"Then you knew who he was, Wun Look?"

"There were eyes in my fingers," grinned the Chinaman. "I saw with my hands and I know."

This was spoken with a positiveness that surprised Silver Steve, and when the blind man had staggered to the table and dropped into the rickety chair there, he continued:

"It was not the Mormon. It was not the woman who threw me from Amber's house. No, it was neither of those. It was Murad, the Mysterious."

"It was Murad, Wun Look, and he held you against the wall and his hands were at your throat."

"You needn't tell me that, Silver Steve; I felt them there all the time. He came upon me like a lion in the night. I came home to find a certain paper which I sent Diamond Don after some time ago, but the place where it was kept was empty, and while I felt for it he came in and I was caught."

"But why should Murad want your life?"

A strange shudder passed over the Celestial's frame.

"They all seem to want it," he answered.

"They don't like the yellow man of Moonstone."

"But why? Why should Murad hate you?"

Do you carry one of his secrets in your bosom?"

There was no reply. The Chinaman twisted uneasily in his chair, and was seen to shut his hands.

"Fingers have eyes, ha! ha! I can feel if I can't see with my old peepers. Come here, Steve."

The athlete of Moonstone went forward and bent over the Chinaman's face.

"The Mormon has a grip on Murad. The man from Utah knows something which is a secret that must not get out by his tongue if Murad can help it."

"But you know the same secret, don't you?"

"Not all of it. Murad, by coming here to clutch my throat, shows that he fears me. You know what will happen now. I will be the branded man of Moonstone. They, the two tigers of the camp—Murad and Mormon Sol—have it in for Wun Look."

The Celestial smiled again and became silent.

"Don't you think it would be wise for you to get out of Moonstone—for a spell?"

"What, go away from Amber, the Beautiful?" cried the Chinaman. "Go away and leave her alone with the woman with the deadly hand? Who would bring her flowers from the mountain?"

"But you are blind, Wun Look. The flowers will hide from you—"

"Fingers have eyes, ha! ha!" strangely laughed the yellow man. "I will find the flowers for Amber, no matter where they hide. They cannot escape Wun Look when he wants to find them for the angel of the camp."

Silver Steve looked at the man in silence, and then touched his arm.

"What was the purport of the missing paper?" he asked.

The Chinaman started.

"Ah, yes, you must go and find Diamond

Don, Steve. Ask him if he found the paper in the log. If he did not, then it fell back into the hands of its once owner."

"Who was that?"

"Mormon Sol."

"Did he know you had the letter when he struck camp?"

"There is no telling what that man knows."

"Does the letter concern him?"

"It condemns the viper," grated the Celestial. "It tells who he is and something about his past. He did not quit camp when you told him to go."

"No. He is here yet."

"Will you tell him again?"

"I will see that one of us leaves Moonstone within twenty-four hours."

"You must not go, Silver Steve. No, it must not be you. Let the Mormon be that man."

Ten minutes later the tall figure of Silver Steve was seen to enter Diamond Don's house.

He found the Sparkling Sport alone, and when he entered the room where he sat he stopped, for a singular look beamed in the man's eyes.

"You found the letter," said Steve. "The Chinaman thought he had been robbed again."

"I found the letter," answered Diamond Don, deliberately. "You never saw anything like it."

At the same time the hand of the Sparkler moved toward his bosom, and he drew forth a piece of folded paper, which showed signs of age, for it was yellow and torn.

"This is the document Wun Look has been guarding all this time," he went on. "He has been hiding it in his shanty, and I guess I am the only person to whom he has intrusted the secret of its retreat."

Silver Steve came forward, his eyes riveted on the paper, and when Diamond Don had unfolded it he laid it upon the table.

"As you see, it is not a whole letter, Steve. It is hardly more than a fragment, but the Chinaman was shrewd enough to see that it means something, and that's why he treasured it up against this cool serpent in black."

By this time the Silver Sport had taken up the letter, and was reading it, with Diamond Don regarding him with a good deal of curiosity.

"This is in part the story of a life," he said, looking up a moment.

"It is more, as you will see by reading on."

"It seems to give you a clew to the crime of the burned camp—it mentions a woman who must have been left behind, dead, by some men who abandoned a certain mining-town in the mountains."

"It is even more explicit than that."

"Great Heaven! I see now," cried Silver Steve. "The hand that penned this letter killed the woman in the mine."

The only answer the Ferret Sport gave Silver Steve was a smile.

For another moment the Silver Sport read on, and then he looked up, and their eyes met.

"This is a clew from an unexpected quarter. Who would have thought that a Chinaman carried in his old shanty the clew to the crime you have been trying to unearth?"

"And a blind Chinaman at that," said Diamond Don, as he reached out his hand for the letter.

"It is Providential."

"At any rate, it is luck," said the Sparkler. "You will perceive that no names are mentioned in the letter; there is nothing to tell to whom it was sent or by whom written."

"I noticed that."

"There is no address at all, but Wun Look stole it from the man who got it a long time ago."

"From Mormon Sol?"

"From the Saint in black," smiled Diamond Don. "The Chinaman was one of a yellow vendetta whose oath meant the wiping out of a lot of men who hanged some Celestials on the borders of Mormondom. This man, Mormon Sol, was one of the doomed and he was the recipient of this damaging letter. You see how he has played into the hands of justice. He did not know when he turned his face toward Moonstone in search of Thirza, the runaway wife, that he was about to come across one of the yellow Vigilantes. He never dreamed that this letter was in that man's possession—that it occupied a secret place in the wall of the Chinaman's abode."

Silver Steve seemed to study the letter in Diamond Don's hands.

"Where is the man who wrote that letter?" he asked.

"That is for us to find out," was the answer. "The hand that wrote it killed Madame Mary in the mine beneath the mine of the mountain camp. The woman who left on the wall of her tomb a command for the person who came to it first to avenge her death and find her child, is the victim of the writer of that letter. It is my life-work to find him. I am Diamond Don, the Sparkler, to these tough men; but I am also Don, the Detective."

The gaze of the speaker fell to the letter and he seemed to read it again.

"The Mormon is not going to quit camp at your bidding?" he smiled, looking up suddenly.

"He did not seem to go very fast."

"Let him stay."

There was a command in the voice of the Sparkling Sport.

"Let the serpent remain," he went on. "This man ought to be under espionage. He got this letter years ago and the man who wrote it may be nearer than we think."

"Nearer and deadlier," said Silver Steve.

"However, if you want Mormon Sol to stay, stay he shall, but there is war, open and declared, between him and Lady Jezebel, and the encounter is liable to take place at any time."

"They must be kept apart. They must not meet for some time. Mormon Sol gave the woman three hours in which to show him the hiding-place of the wife she has concealed, but the Mormon won't press that point."

"He would better not, for Lady Jezebel is a tigress when she hates any one."

"She doesn't like you, Steve?"

"Oh, that's old," smiled the Silver Sport. "We have never been on good terms, but I don't fault her for that. You will keep that letter?"

"I will keep it because Wun Look is not the proper custodian of a secret of its importance."

"If the man who sought his throat awhile ago discovers that he had that letter and lost it—if he suspects that it has been transferred to your hands—there will be trouble."

"Murad, the Mysterious, may have his hands full," remarked Diamond Don. "I know something of this man, mysterious as he is to the majority of the camp. Murad is a puzzle; he went to the shanty of the blind Chinaman and tried to choke the life out of him. But for you he would have accomplished his mission. You have the thanks of Wun Look, but the undying hatred of the Mogul of Moonstone."

"I realize that. I know that this day I have incurred the ill will of a man who never smiled on me. Murad once met me in the mines and I heard behind me a step which vanished when I turned with my hand on the butt of a revolver. He knows that I heard him. He knows that after that I saw him alone on the mountain tying a rag to a bush as if to signal some one far off. This man has the cunning of the striped tiger and the secretiveness of the lynx. Murad, the Mysterious!"

The last sentence was a half sneer, but the cheeks of the speaker were flushed and he waited for Diamond Don to speak again.

"What was that?" cried the Sparkling Sport, springing up and going toward the window.

"Look yonder," he went on, pointing toward the square. "They have already enmeshed the wife-hunter."

Both men looked out and saw the tall form of Mormon Sol standing erect before a lot of dark-shirted men who glared at him like a band of tigers.

The Mormon's back was turned to the sport's house, and he seemed to be backing toward it step by step, but with his face toward the mob and in his hands a pair of six-shooters.

"He doesn't look much like a Saint now?" said Silver Steve.

"There's nothing saint-like about him but the black coat and the big hat."

Step by step came the beleaguered Mormon toward the house, and the two friends looked on with a good deal of mingled curiosity and delight.

"They must have been incited against him by something," said Silver Steve.

"Perhaps it is one of Lady Jezebel's trumps. But they must not hang the Saint. His time has not yet come and—By Jove! they are closing in on him!"

The revolvers so resolutely clutched by the Mormon were raised, and looked the men in the face. But against the mob he could do nothing beyond a momentary resistance.

"It is time for interference," cried Diamond Don. "The Mormon tiger must not fall a prey to the lions of Moonstone!" and the next moment he opened the door and stepped out, resolved to rescue Mormon Sol from the hands of the toughs of the mountain capital.

CHAPTER IX.

HELD TO THE COMPACT.

No one thought of interference from that quarter.

The men of Moonstone were taken aback when they saw emerge from the Sparkler's house, his well known figure and when he came forward, and all at once placed himself alongside the menaced man they looked at one another, inwardly wondering what it meant.

That Diamond Don, the bediamonded sport of the camp, should save a hated Mormon—a man who wanted to drag a woman back into human slavery—was something the toughs could not get through their heads, and for several seconds they did not speak.

Diamond Don's action seemed to have struck the whole mob dumb.

Mormon Sol was the most astounded of all.

He saw the handsome sport at his side and gave him a look of amazement.

What did it mean?

"What has this man done?" asked the Sparkler, addressing the mob. "Why do you run him down like a common murderer and face him with your revolvers?"

"That's it," put in the Mormon himself before the men could answer. "I want to know myself if this isn't a free country and if all men haven't equal rights in it."

"I'll be hanged if a Mormon ought ter have any," growled one of the foremost toughs.

"But what has this man done?"

"In the first place, he wants ter take a woman back to slavery."

"Isn't she his wife?"

"His Mormon wife, but—"

The speaker looked abashed with the eye of Diamond Don looking him through.

"Is that all you have against him? Because he is looking for a runaway wife you corral him like a common thief and threaten to shoot him down."

"We didn't look for you ter defend a Mormon, Diamond Don."

"He's a man, no matter what his creed," said the Sparkling Sport. "He is entitled to protection until fairly tried and condemned."

Then he looked at the menaced man, and said in lower tones:

"Go to my house. You will be safe there from this little mob. Don't be afraid that this affair will compromise me. I will take care of myself."

Mormon gave his preserver another look and backed toward the house.

Inside, a silent spectator of all this, stood Silver Steve, and when the Mormon opened the door, he came face to face with the man who had ordered him from camp.

In a moment the hand of the Silver Sport reached forth and he closed the door after the man from Mormondom.

Mormon Sol seemed on the eve of backing out and facing the mob rather than stand alone in the presence of the Branded Athlete; but the shutting of the door cut off all retreat.

"They wanted my life out there—the tigers did," said Sol, glancing toward the Plaza. "They think a man has no rights just because he hunts his own when they run away."

"They don't like men of your belief in this camp. They never did take kindly to Saints in Moonstone."

"The time will come when they will wish they had never seen Mormon Sol," grated the dark-faced man. "The scum of the mines, they shall rue this interference with my designs."

He passed on into the room where Diamond Don usually received his visitors, and there waited for the Sparkler's appearance.

Presently the door opened and he caught sight of the well-knit figure of the Sparkling Sport.

Silver Steve was not with him, and as the handsome fellow closed the door after him and saw Mormon Sol standing by the table, he smiled and referred to the little affair outside.

"In the first place, let me thank you," said the Mormon. "You did me a service I shall never forget. I had it in for the whole lot. I would have killed the first six, for," with a grim smile, "I know how to shoot."

"I've no doubt of that. I saw your hands gripping the revolvers, and a man who clutches a six-shooter like you do, can send a bullet straight to the center of the target. I don't doubt your shooting qualities, Mr. Olds; but there would have been deadly work if the ball had opened."

The Mormon looked away and said, half-interrogatively:

"They are out there yet, I presume?"

"No, they have gone back to liquor up, but they won't try to get you so long as you are under protection."

Under protection! He did not like the sound of these words, but there was no help for it.

Diamond Don took a chair at the table, and pushed a box of cigars toward the man across the boards.

He saw the fingers of Mormon Sol dip into the box and select a cigar, then he watched him light the weed, and when he had done so he began:

"This woman of yours gives you a good deal of trouble, eh, Mr. Olds? Has she ever given you the slip before?"

"Never before. Thirza was a little troublesome, but I managed to curb her until now."

"You haven't struck her trail yet?"

The lips of the Mormon seemed to come suddenly together.

"I know where she is," he said. "That is, I have been told—told to my teeth—that she is under protection. Isn't that pretty hard, Diamond Don?"

The Sparkling Sport looked astonished.

"It's rather tough, but you can lay hands on her with a little stratagem, can't you?"

"Yes. When I am ready to take Thirza back I will do so. I did not cross the mountains to be cowed by a woman, one who years ago made a noose and—"

He caught himself and blew a cloud of smoke between his face and Diamond Don's.

"If you refer to Lady Jezebel you will find her a foe worthy of your steel. She is the ruling woman of Moonstone and—"

"And knows all about Murad the Mysterious, eh?"

Diamond Don laughed.

"Do you think so? Are you sure that the secret which that man hides is known to Lady Jezebel?"

"Perhaps I am going it a little too fast. I don't want to interfere with any one's business, but this woman who faced me and declared that Thirza was under her protection and that I dared not take her away—I hate the very ground she walks over!"

He brought one of the dark hands down upon the table and scowled.

"I will go out and face them all. They don't know what trumps I can play."

He arose and stood over the seated sport.

"The door is yonder, but you go out at your peril," said Diamond Don.

"Is this man, Murad, popular here?" the Mormon asked.

"He is sometimes called the Mogul of Moonstone."

"And when he wants order, order will come out of chaos, eh?"

"Sometimes."

"That will do. I thank you again. You came to my rescue when perhaps I was environed by thy Philistines. We will meet again."

The hand of Mormon Sol touched his hat and his eyes seemed to flash as he turned toward the door. Diamond Don followed him with a look of wonder for his coolness, and saying that when he was hard pressed, he would find an asylum where he then was, he saw his back and in a minute the man from Utah was outside.

There was a buoyancy to Mormon Sol's step as he crossed the threshold of Diamond Don's house and walked down the street. He threw a look toward Brushwood's where he thought his late enemies were congregated but did not turn his feet in that direction.

He kept on until he reached Buzzard Ben's shanty, the door of which he threw open and sprung inside.

"Well, I'm out of the trap, no thanks to you," he exclaimed, facing Ben who had not shown his face at the confrontation. "You promised to stand by me through thick and thin—that was a part of the compact—but the first time the Cause is threatened, you stay indoors and leave me to fight the battle alone."

Instead of blushing at these words Buzzard Ben simply ran his fingers through his reddish beard and smiled.

"I thought you war able to take care of yourself an' didn't think it worth while to interfere," said he. "Secondly, when I saw Diamond Don waltz from the house and stand alongside, I knew that you had an ally worth his weight in gold. He wears diamonds and affects gold rings, but there is fight in every ounce of his blood."

"No more apologies," broke in Mormon Sol, fearful that Buzzard Ben would interpolate a few more. "I am free and that is something. I had six men marked, and all would have died before your humble servant. I want help now."

"Help?"

"Yes."

"To throw up the sponge and get out of camp?"

"The last thing Mormon Sol will think of! What, desert this spot with the game but half played out, and the wife unfound? I came hither for another purpose, and now for the first play."

Buzzard Ben looked, but said nothing.

The Saint folded his long arms, and for a moment contemplated the man in the chair.

"I have let the three hours of grace given Lady Jezebel go by without doing anything to carry out my threat. To-night we play the first card."

"I don't understand you."

"Don't be in a hurry."

The Mormon seemed to think a moment, and then leaning toward Buzzard Ben, he continued in lower tones:

"Murad, the Mysterious, is master in Moonstone. By reason of the mystery that surrounds him he is the head mogul of this mountain lair. This man is the mainspring of everything here. He must be struck."

"How struck?"

"He must be made to know that we are as potent as he. He is more than Murad, as I have intimated to you. You already know that he and Lady Jezebel are man and wife, though this secret has been well kept by them from the men by whom they have surrounded themselves. Touch one and you strike both. My wife—let that pass for the present. I have others where she came from, and then, I have been Mormon for a purpose which I need not keep from you much longer if you prove faithful to my cause. You want to be mogul, but you can't be without my help. I can make you a bonanza king, and a dashing money bandit. Mormon Sol! Ho!"

He stopped suddenly, and looked at the attentive Ben.

The hands of the Mormon interlaced and wound their fingers in and out among each other like a number of little serpents.

"I don't know about serving this man," said Buzzard Ben to himself. "He don't seem more than half-human; he has confessed that he is a mixture of man and devil, and I believe him. What does he want me to do?"

For some time the Mormon did not return to the thing uppermost in his fertile brain, but when he came back to it the reference was so sudden that the miner-sport started.

"There is a mine beneath the house of Murad, the Mysterious," he said.

"Who told you?"

"Never mind that. One is there. You will enter the house between this and midnight. I will come at midnight."

"What if I am seen there? What if the eyes of Murad find me beneath his roof?"

"That is your own lookout. You must be careful. If he sees you there he will be apt to shoot a hole through your head."

It was on Buzzard Ben's tongue to back out of the whole affair; but actual fear of the strange man into whose clutches he had thrown himself by an oath, constrained him.

"You will be there when I come. You will be in the house of Murad, the Mysterious. We are going to see what is in the mine."

"If thar war no mine—"

"But there is!" and the eyes of the speaker looked like flashes of flame. "Underneath this man's house is a mine of fabulous wealth. Haven't you often wondered where he got his gold? Did you ever see much taken out of the mines he operates by the men who are under his hand? There is not another mine like the one we are going to visit to-night."

"Then it must be a bonanza and no mistake."

"It is more than that. It is the highway to Ophir."

The eyes of Buzzard Ben beamed with delight. "I will be in that house at midnight. You must be there when I come," and the Mormon removed his gaze from the miner-sport.

CHAPTER X.

DOWN IN THE DARK.

AMBER, after the scene at her home between Lady Jezebel and Wun Look, the Chinaman, seemed to fear the woman who called her daughter.

There was something akin to fear where before there had been honor if not reverence, and when she looked at the face seen every day she noticed that a change had come over it.

The beautiful girl saw Lady Jezebel come back after the meeting between Mormon Sol and the mob and when she closed the door she stood for moment before the fair Amber with clinched hands.

"Diamond Don came between and took the Mormon out of my trap," she said.

"Out of your trap?" echoed Amber.

"Yes, out of my trap. It was I who incited the men. It was my hand that directed them, but Diamond Don, the Sparkler, came between and spoiled the game."

"Mother, you seem to hate this man."

"I hate him! I never did like him and the moment I saw him for the first time a feeling of hatred took possession of my heart and I harbor it still. What is he? What is Diamond Don but a sport who is here for a purpose of his own and who has in hand a game against the lives and happiness of those who are his betters."

Lady Jezebel went to the window and looked out. The shades of another night were gathering about the camp and as she gazed down the rambling street, she caught sight of a figure which had just come in sight.

"Come here, Amber," she said, without looking round.

In a moment the girl was at Lady Jezebel's side, and pointing toward the man in the street she said:

"There is another of them. That man is hand-in-glove with Diamond Don and you must hate him as I do."

The clear eyes of Amber saw that the person thus singled out by Lady Jezebel was Silver Steve, the handsome, long-haired sport of Moonstone, and without looking up a flush suffused her face and she answered:

"Must we hate every one but ourselves?"

"No, but you must hate those whom I hate," was the quick reply. "You must curse the men whom I curse, and if I tell you to arm yourself against them, it must be done."

"But that is Silver Steve. That is a man who cannot be my foe, no matter what happens." In an instant Lady Jezebel had whirled upon the girl and her fingers seemed to sink into her arm.

"Is that a confession of love?" she cried. "Dare you confess to me that you actually call Silver Steve, Diamond Don's ally, more than a friend?"

The girl, white-faced and frightened in the grip of that small but vise-like hand, looked away.

"It is enough!" cried the maddened creature. "That man is doomed!"

"Doomed? For heaven's sake, why are all hated who are my friends? You sprung upon

poor sightless Wun Look like a tigress and now you place Silver Steve under the ban. What has that man done to merit your hatred?"

"He belongs to the Sparkling Sport and that is enough. He is more dangerous than the dark-faced man who just awhile ago was rescued from the mob. Mormon Sol and Silver Steve are birds of a feather, though perhaps they don't live in the same nest. It's all one, Amber. You love that man at your eternal peril," and the hand fell from the girl's arm and Lady Jezebel, stepping back, glared for a second at the angel of the camp and relapsed into silence.

It was a strange interview.

As night and silence succeeded, the camp seemed to put on new life; the door of Brushwood's was thrown open once more for its nightly visitors and the bronzed men took their accustomed seats at the tables.

But there was one denizen of Moonstone who was not there.

As the night wore on this personage slipped from his shanty and managed to enter the house of Murad, the Mysterious, by a rear door.

Buzzard Ben was keeping his part of the compact and was about to lie hid in the place until Mormon Sol came.

The sole occupant of a small room which showed that it was rarely visited by any one, the man crouched in a corner and told off the moments by his heart-beats.

He had entered the house without once meeting the man whose life was a puzzle to Moonstone; he had not encountered any one and now that he had progressed so far without accident, he was even eager to see what there was in the rest of the game.

Once he heard a door open and shut, then a footstep in the halls below, nothing more.

Midnight came to the man in the mogul's house.

All at once the door leading into the room where he was crouched swung open and a figure appeared between him and the stars beyond the window.

Buzzard Ben gripped the revolver upon which his hand had rested for some time and leaned forward with a demon in his eye.

But it was Mormon Sol.

There was no mistaking the tall form that advanced across the room and found him as easily as if it had been lit up with the light of noonday.

"I am here. Come!" said the voice of the man from Utah, and Buzzard Ben, rising, accompanied him from the chamber.

"We are the only ones in the house of the man-mystery," whispered Mormon Sol. "Now is our time."

They passed to the rooms below. No light anywhere.

Suddenly in the chamber occupied most by Murad, the Mormon stooped and to Buzzard Ben's surprise lifted a door in the floor.

"Is that the mouth of the new Ophir?" asked the miner sport, drawing back and looking the Mormon in the eye.

"Go down and see."

The black, yawning pit seemed dangerous even to one as reckless as the man with the red beard.

"Pshaw! you are not afraid of holes in the earth? Come! I will lead the way. Let the door shut after you. It is easily done. There! Now we are safe."

They stood side by side in a small dark chamber under ground. They could touch the walls of the place with their hands and for a little while both men stood still and seemed to be engaged with their thoughts.

"This way. We will go on in the dark. There will be light enough by and by."

Down the corridor they went, the Mormon in the advance, but his skeleton-like fingers encircled Buzzard Ben's wrists and seemed to leave their imprint there.

The bearded sport wondered if that lane was one that ever turned. He felt little particles of stones slide from under his feet; he knew from the air that he was far under ground and that the path they were treading led deeper and deeper into the earth.

On, on, they went, as if Mormon Sol was a messenger from the under world commissioned to carry back a living soul for punishment.

"Halt! Here we are."

The words had a refreshing sound for Buzzard Ben.

He saw and heard nothing.

Presently a strange flame flared up in his face and he looked into the deep-set eyes of the Mormon.

"I don't see any signs of an Ophir here," he ventured to say.

There was a light laugh on Mormon Sol's part and the hand for the first time left his wrist.

"I will show you in a little while. Have patience. I want to let you down into the chamber of gold. There is no risk, only it hasn't been visited by any one for years unless Murad has been here. Look straight ahead."

Buzzard Ben did so and saw that the path they had been treading came to an abrupt end.

They went forward until they reached a sheer precipice, and leaning over the abyss, looked down into what seemed a bottomless pit.

"It's not half so bad as it looks," said the Mormon. "It isn't very far down there."

"How far?"

"Perhaps the length of this rope," and Mormon Sol drew from beneath his coat a rope which he began to uncoil, watched by the man at his side.

Buzzard Ben took hold of the rope and tested it as best he could.

After awhile he wrapped it around his hands and with gritted teeth, lowered himself over the abyss and went down with his feet against the wall.

He was not long in reaching the bottom of the pit and when his feet touched hard ground he unwound the rope and stood erect.

"Are you down?" said a voice from the top.

"I am here. What next?"

"Follow the wall to your right and enter the little chamber which you will find."

There was silence for a minute and the voice of Buzzard Ben came faintly up to the Mormon.

"I am here, but see nothing," said Ben. "Is this the road to your Ophir?"

It seemed to him that a derisive laugh came down through the darkness; but he did not respond. Something cold and heavy touched his hand. He picked it up and balanced it like a miner weighing on his palm the first nugget of the sluices.

"This feels like gold," said Ben. "By heavens! I believe we have found Ophir sure enough."

While he was groping his way through the dark of the unknown mine, Mormon Sol, far overhead, was listening to a sound that seemed to come from toward the opening of the bonanza.

The Mormon had put out his light and was standing against the wall with his owl-like eyes trying to penetrate the gloom and catch first sight of the person or ghost that seemed between him and the upper world.

"What if Murad has come back and is in the mine himself?" he asked his conscience. "I would give a good deal to get the drop on him in this part of his dominion. I would like to face him here and with a six-shooter at his head. He knows why I am here; I am sure he does. He knows that I know who he is, for when I turned on him in Lady Jezebel's presence he was as dumb as an oyster."

Suddenly out of the gloom which Mormon Sol was trying his best to penetrate, there came a light like the flashing up of a match.

It threw the Mormon back and elevated his pistol.

"I have you at the mercy of my trigger," said a voice that went through him like an arrow. "Lift a hand, utter a cry, and I will paint the wall on your right with your brains!"

There was no mistaking the meaning of those coolly spoken words.

If they had been heard in the dark, the identity of the speaker would have been just as certain.

It did not need the light to tell Mormon Sol who had spoken.

Forward in the light moved a figure that made no noise as it came on. One hand was outstretched, and behind it was seen a face that had no sign of mercy in eye or feature.

"I am going to drop you dead in your tracks, and the secret mine shall be forever your grave. You have played one hand too many. You have carried the plot too far. I am going to remain Murad, the Mysterious, and you will never tell what you know to the world."

The man was Murad, the Mogul.

CHAPTER XI.

THE RESPITE.

MORMON SOL found himself in the closest place of his eventful life.

He was looking into the eyes of Murad, the Mysterious, and in front of them saw the cocked six-shooter which he knew so well how to handle.

There was no mistaking the attitude of the man who had come down into the mine after he and his partner, Buzzard Ben, and who now stood erect in the light of his torch and was ready, as he said, to send him to his death with a bullet through the brain.

Ben himself was deeper down in the darkness, looking for the highway to Ophir, while he (Mormon Sol) had to face the cool-head of Moonstone alone.

The man from Utah thought rapidly as he looked into the face of the person before him.

"So you are going to drop me dead in my tracks, eh?" he said.

"That is just what I intend doing, and if you were in my shoes you would do the same, for you understand the situation, and you know that while you are in Moonstone, ostensibly looking for a runaway wife, you are playing another game, deeper still. You are conspiring against me."

"Against you? How?" asked the Mormon.

"Don't ask me when you know how," was the quick reply. "You are not alone in the game, but you have corrupted one of the miners of the camp, and, if I am not mistaken, he came down into the mine with you."

Mormon Sol did not ask Murad how he knew this.

"You would not quit the camp if you were to discover your wife," the mountain mogul went on.

For a moment there was no answer.

"Don't you know that I am master here, and that this mine is one of the secrets I am keeping from the rough men by whom I am surrounded?"

"I know that."

"I don't want to know how you discovered it. You have found it out and that is enough."

"Enough, did you say?" said the Mormon, smiling for the first time since the meeting. "I know more than this. I know something which will not die with me."

A slight start by Murad showed that he was deeply interested.

"I say boldly, and not for the purpose of turning aside your bullet, that what I know will not perish with Mormon Sol. You may leave me where I am, dead and doomed to rot in the darkness of this underground corridor, but the secret will go out to the world that much sooner, and the hand of justice will surely fall upon the shoulders of Murad, the Mogul."

"That is a new game, I see," laughed the man with the revolver. "I see what you are driving at, but it won't avail you anything. You are doomed."

The figure of the Mormon adventurer straightened as he calmly folded his arms.

"All right," he said. "I am ready if you are."

He looked into the eyes of Murad, and seemed to await the shot with perplexing coolness.

"What has this man done to guard the secret and to let it get out in the event of his death," thought Murad. "There is no telling what sort of provision he has made. Mormon Sol always was a cool, calculating devil in bronze, and when I think I have him at the mercy of my revolver, he comes back at me with a weapon almost as deadly as my six-shooter, and confronts me with it, and I let him live."

All at once a voice came up from below. It was Buzzard Ben calling to the Mormon to throw down the rope, that he might come up to where his friend was.

Murad started at the sound, and leaned toward the edge of the abyss down which Buzzard Ben had gone hand over hand on Mormon Sol's rope.

"Call that man up here," said the Mysterious. Sol stepped toward the ledge and looked down into the pit.

At the same time the Mogul of Moonstone moved nearer, and continued to cover him with the revolver.

The Mormon made a trumpet with his hands and called to the man below.

Presently certain sounds told that some one was coming up the rope by bracing his feet against the wall, and when the head of Buzzard Ben appeared above the top and his eyes caught sight of Murad standing like a statue with leveled pistol, he gave a loud cry, and nearly relinquished his hold on the cord.

"So you are in the plot, too, are you?" said Murad. "You have united your fortunes with this man, Mormon Sol?"

Buzzard Ben had reached the corridor, and was not long taking in the situation.

"He led me into it," he said. "I did not want to conspire against you, but this man—"

The hand of Mormon Sol suddenly came up, and the next moment it covered the speaker like a revolver.

"I will take all the responsibility for that man's treachery to you, since he plays the coward with such alacrity. I poisoned his mind against you, Murad, but it was the easiest job man ever had. The coward was ripe for revolt; he was ready to betray you. The thought of finding in this mine something by which he could tempt fortune back to him was all that was needed. I hate cowards like him. They die soon, generally ignominious deaths, and, if I live, I will see that this one is no exception to the rule."

Buzzard Ben looked at the Mormon and ground his teeth beneath his red beard; but he did not resent the cutting language he had just heard.

"Go back!" Murad said to Ben. "Pass me and go toward the door behind me."

The man obeyed, and in a little while stood near the door of the passage.

Then, suddenly lowering his revolver, the Mysterious went toward Mormon Sol, and said:

"There should be no open war between us. You shall have your wife if you will take her back to Mormondom and leave me alone here."

For a moment the Mormon looked at him with a strange light in his eyes.

"I thought you were going to let me rot where I am," he said.

"Never mind. I have just made a proposition. You are the man who once did me an important service."

"One which you recall even at this time, eh?"

"I recall it."

"I am to get my wife back, then? She is protected by Lady Jezebel, your wife."

Murad seemed to stagger back, but he did not remove his gaze from the man before him.

"She isn't as beautiful as she was once," Mormon Sol went on. "But she is as devilish, and as dangerous as ever."

"Just so. But we are not here to discuss a woman's qualities. What will you do?"

"I want my wife back, of course—"

"You shall have her."

"But Lady Jezebel will stand between you and the deliverance."

"We will see about that."

The following moment the Mogul of Moonstone turned to Buzzard Ben, and told him to go on out, shutting the door behind him and quitting the house altogether.

Glad to get away on these terms, the man with the reddish beard slipped out of the corridor, and in a little while was once more beneath the stars of midnight.

Then it was that Murad came close to Mormon Sol, and looking him in the face caught his arm and whispered:

"That man is a coward. He is the Jonah of the camp, except the Celestial who is harmless since losing his sight."

"What, did you fear the Chinaman?" asked Mormon Sol. "When did he cross your path?"

"Months ago," was the answer. "But come back to the house. We will talk there. No, we should not be foes, especially in the light of coming events. You know what I mean, for you have kept your eyes open since coming to Moonstone."

Mormon Sol followed Murad back to the house, and when that worthy had conducted him to a room where they would be free from all observation, he said:

"Mormon Sol—I call you by the name you own now—we should be friends. More than this, we must be friends. Half an hour ago I followed you into the mine with the intention of leaving you there with a bullet in your head. Now I don't think of anything of the kind. Look here."

The Mogul of Moonstone opened his bosom and displayed on his skin a tattoo of clasped hands surmounted by a dagger.

"You have not forgotten the old mark," he went on, seeing the interest the Mormon took in the tattoo. "It recalls a past in which we both took part. You are against me. You threaten me with the divulgement of a secret which, in the interest of both of us, should be kept. The wife shall come back to you. You shall see Thirza, the Sixth, and see her soon. I don't care what Lady Jezebel says."

"You think you can beat her, do you?"

"I know I can. She hates you, Mormon Sol; she hates you, not because you are one of the Saints, but for another reason."

The Mormon showed his teeth a moment, but remained silent.

"You won't let me play my hand against this wife of yours? You won't let me show Lady Jezebel that though I am a stranger in a strange land, I am by no means powerless?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I would like to show her that I carry trumps about me all the time. That is a pretty girl you have."

"Amber?"

Mormon Sol nodded.

"Lady Jezebel thinks a good deal of her," he went on at last. "She will some day be a lovely woman; she is that now, but she will become lovelier than ever."

Murad looked at the speaker, but did not reply.

"Look here. It is true as I told you in the bonanza that I had prepared for all emergencies. Before coming here I placed the secrets I possess in safe keeping; but I can make them doubly safe by a little agreement which we may come to."

"I don't understand you."

"I am willing to let Thirza go," smiled Sol. "She wants 'out of bondage' as she calls it, and I don't care for her any longer. True, she will some day come into possession of some property in the East, but that is no inducement for me to want her back in the old nest! I like younger wives. I want another one to be the ruling queen of the household—one who can add dignity and power to it. Don't you see? I am rich. In all Mormondom there is no one besides the Father of Mormonism who is beyond me in this respect. I can set up an establishment that will outshine all the others. But I want a young wife for it."

It began to dawn on the mind of Murad what this crafty man was after.

He saw through the words he had just heard, and when the last one had fallen from Mormon Sol's tongue he leaned toward him and laughed.

"I understand you, Sol, but I guess you are treating with the wrong person," he said.

"How the wrong person?"

"Lady Jezebel is the one with whom you want to treat."

The Mormon seemed taken aback.

"But you just told me that you could bring her to terms!" he exclaimed.

"On some things, I should have said. But when you seek the hand of Amber, that is another matter."

"She thinks a good deal of you, eh, Murad?"

"She says she does!" smiled the Mogul.

"Then, I'll try her. I'm not afraid of this woman, despite the shock she gave me when she faced me and said boldly that she had Thirza under her protection. Yes, I'll try this creature—this secret wife of yours. Leave that to me. But there is another question, Murad. The Chinaman has lost his eyes, but he has friends."

"I know that."

"Diamond Don is one of them."

"And Silver Steve is another."

"And Diamond Don and Silver Steve are friends to each other," added the Mormon.

"This is true. These two men are against us. The sightless Celestial says he will put eyes in his fingers and find the hand that blinded him."

The lips of the Mormon seemed to curl proudly.

"If he tries that he may lose those eyes as well," and he laughed as he turned to quit the house of the man who a short time before had him at the mercy of his revolver.

CHAPTER XII.

BACK INTO THE TOILS.

ALONE in a chamber which was underground, like others in the immediate neighborhood, stood a woman who had passed her thirtieth year.

She was not handsome, for there were traces of care about her face, and her hands were long, thin, and, in the light, almost transparent.

This was Thirza, the Mormon wife, the woman, who had escaped from the land of the Saints, and to find whom Mormon had left the confines of Mormonism with the avowed intention of taking her back to slavery.

She was in the place to which Lady Jezebel had conducted her, and now she appeared to be waiting for some one, for every now and then she cast glances toward the entrance, and with eyes full of expectation watched it as if her life depended on her vigilance.

At last the woman started toward the light, and lifting her hand, was about to put it out, when she heard a voice that restrained her, and she stood face to face with Lady Jezebel.

The Queen of Moonstone, as she was sometimes called, came forward and stood before the hunted woman.

There was a singular look in Lady Jezebel's eyes, and for some time she did not speak.

"What is it?" cried Thirza. "What has happened that you stare at me and say nothing? Has the tiger of Mormondom broken over into your garden?"

Lady Jezebel started toward Thirza and suddenly clutched her arm.

"Are you afraid to go back?" she asked.

"My God! what do you mean?"

"Are you afraid to go back to the Saints?"

These words seemed to strike Thirza dumb. She fell from Lady Jezebel's grasp and for a second stood in the light like a person roused from some horrible dream with her surroundings still suggestive of the vision.

"You don't mean to send me back—to give me over into the hands of that wretch?" she cried. "It can't be that after all your promises of protection you will surrender me to him?"

"That is not answering my question," coolly answered Lady Jezebel. "Are you afraid to go back?"

"I will never go back!"

Thirza spoke these words looking Lady Jezebel in the eye and speaking with calmness which told her companion how determined she was.

"You won't go back, you say? That shows courage, but perhaps he will be found the stronger."

"Then you are going to break your pledges—you are going to turn me over to Mormon Sol?"

"I guess you would better go back and try and get along with him once more."

The look of Thirza became a stare and for a moment she seemed to glare tigerishly at Lady Jezebel.

"So this is the end of the struggle? I am to be betrayed and handed back to the bondsman. I am to be given up to the torture of the Mormon lash. Where is he?"

She asked this question with such vindictiveness that the woman who heard her fell back and nearly lost her balance.

"What bargain did you make with him?" Thirza went on. "What is the agreement between you and this modern Satan?"

"Never mind. I can't hide you any longer. You must go out of my hands and I have promised to release you."

"No more!"

Thirza caught up the lamp and held it above her head.

"I am ready. Lead me to the man who wants his runaway wife. I have suffered for my foolishness. I am ready to go back to Mormon Sol; but the day of retribution is near at hand. I will pay back all those who had a hand in my surrender, and I will see that the punishment is adequate to the crime."

Lady Jezebel did not stir.

"Show me the way, I say," cried Thirza. "I am eager to see him once more."

"I did not come to lead you to him. I only

came to say that I can not conceal you any longer."

"Because of the bargain! What did he agree to give you? Or, perhaps, he knows a secret which is to be kept in the dark on account of your action in surrendering me back to Mormon Sol."

The two women standing face to face in the underground retreat, which had been Thirza's dungeon ever since her coming to Moonstone as the fugitive wife, looked at one another as if they were from this time on to be bitter enemies. They seemed to realize that the bargain which Thirza had mentioned had made them such and that they were to play no unimportant part in the drama from that hour.

"Is he out yonder?" asked the Mormon wife, pointing down the corridor.

"I don't know where he is."

"But you can't hide me any longer. Is that it?"

"That is it," replied Lady Jezebel, irritatingly.

Thirza moved on as if she were the sole tenant of the mine, and not until the woman who was watching her ran forward and caught her sleeve did she look back.

"Where are you going?" asked Murad's wife.

"Why stop me? You have betrayed me to this tiger—you have sold the secret you have kept for some days. Stand back, traitress, and let me go out."

The very mien of the hunted wife appalled Lady Jezebel. She recoiled and stared at her, as she turned away and moved again toward the entrance.

"You can get away. The mountain will swallow you up, and he might miss you there."

"Ha! ha! are you repenting of the bargain you made?" laughed Thirza.

There was no reply and the Mormon wife, passing on, was almost out of sight when she was stopped by Lady Jezebel's voice.

"You can go where you please. I have not sold you out, but there are times when one is forced to break a promise one would sooner keep."

"No apologies. Let me go without that. I am not afraid to meet the man from whom I have hidden. He can have me if he can find and hold me. While I would not go back to slavery in Mormondom, I will not shrink from the fate before me. Better there than here in the power of a traitress."

These were galling words for Lady Jezebel to listen to, but there was no help for it.

She saw the figure of Thirza vanish in the dim light, and in another moment she had started forward and was following her.

Thirza passed on up into the light of the stars, and stood for a second beneath them as if admiring their beauty.

Suddenly she turned toward the lights that gleamed here and there in Moonstone and seemed to select a certain one, for she went toward it, and fixed her gaze upon the glow it made on the ground, where it fell from the open door of Brushwood's place.

The hunted woman entered the den, to the utter astonishment of the dozen men who stood near the bar or were at the tables in the corners.

Her tall figure was revealed to all and for a little while they seemed to regard her as an apparition from spirit land.

"Gentlemen of Moonstone, I am Thirza, the hunted wife of Mormon Sol!" suddenly exclaimed the woman, coming down the narrow aisle. "I am the person he has been hunting, and I have been betrayed into his hands by one of my own sex. Where is the Mormon tiger?"

There was no reply, for the men were too astonished to speak, and they looked from her to one another, wondering from whence she had come.

"Heavens! you don't intend to go back with him?" said one of the toughs at last. "You won't lack for friends here, but you surely don't want to return to slavery with Mormon Sol?"

"A thousand thanks," bowed the woman who heard. "I am ready to meet my husband. Where does he stay?"

"He is Buzzard Ben's guest. You might find him there."

"Where is Buzzard Ben's shanty?"

Several men came forward to show her and she was directed to the place which could be seen from the door of Brushwood's and in another moment the figure of Thirza was moving upon the cabin.

There was a strange look in her eyes. Her hands seemed clinched, but the woe-begone countenance had changed for an expression of cool determination.

The toughs of Moonstone watched her, while she walked toward Buzzard Ben's shanty, and when she reached the door and opened it without knocking they wondered what her reception would be.

Thirza found herself face to face with two men, one of whom sprung up with a cry the moment the lamp-light showed him her face and figure.

It was Mormon Sol himself.

"So she turned you loose, eh?" cried the man from Mormondom. "She let you go when I

pulled the strings on her. I thought she wasn't so anxious to keep you under protection as she let on. Buzzard Ben, this is the lady I have spoken of to you—this is Thirza, or "Number Six." You see she has come back to me, as I told you she would when I got ready to pull the string.

The voice of the Mormon was a laugh of triumph and as he came forward, with it ringing throughout the shanty, he was startled to see Thirza fall back against the wall and drop one of her hands to the folds of her dress.

"Better look out. She may have something there whar her hand is," cried Buzzard Ben.

Mormon Sol dropped his eyes to the hidden hand and tried to see what it gripped, if anything, but he was unable to do so.

The figure of Thirza stood erect in the light, her deep-set eyes riveted upon the man who had hunted her down, and when she saw him come forward again one of her hands went up and she drew out a knife with a long slender blade.

"That's what I thought she had," said the bronzed friend of the Mormon. "Look out that she doesn't use it on you, Mormon Sol."

But the man from Utah laughed and continued to advance.

Slowly the hand of Thirza fell to her side as if controlled by some invisible power, and presently she threw the knife to the floor while she looked at Mormon Sol like a person under the influence of some strange spell.

Buzzard Ben leaned forward and gazed at the startling tableau. He saw that Thirza was being charmed, or hypnotized by the wretch who confronted her, and as she fell completely into his power, he (Ben) could not but wonder if Sol had the same power over all whom he met.

"Now, what do you think?" suddenly whispered the triumphant Mormon, glancing at Buzzard Ben while he pointed at the woman who had dropped into the rough chair near which she had stood. "You don't think now that, though a Mormon in a Mormon-hating community, I am powerless. That creature is as clay in my hands. She is powerless for harm, and a child could lead her back to the old nest while she is in that condition."

There was no answer. The events of the last few moments had so impressed Buzzard Ben that he found himself deprived of speech.

"I could send her to crime with a word," continued Mormon Sol. "I put the fallen knife back into her hand—thus. Now I will tell her to kill you."

He bent forward and spoke to Thirza and her eyes instantly became fastened upon Buzzard Ben.

"That is the man. He is your bitter enemy. If he escapes you are doomed," said Mormon Sol.

The figure of Thirza left the chair and stood erect, the knife clutched in her hand and her feet moving toward the miner-sport who did not know what to make of it.

"Kill him!" commanded Mormon Sol. "That is the bitterest foe you have in the world. If he lives you go back to the land of the Mormons."

She came toward Ben with a cry and a bound. The bronzed man fell back against the bare logs and threw out his hands.

"Hold her off, Mormon Sol!" he cried. "In God's name, why should she murder me?"

The Mormon laughed and caught the uplifted hand of Thirza, and, arresting her in her onward rush, held her off while Buzzard Ben got a new breath of genuine relief.

"I only wanted you to see what I can do," calmly said the Mormon Saint. "I am as much devil as saint and the person who fights me is in a losing game," and leading Thirza back to the chair he released her wrist and after awhile Buzzard Ben, still white, came forward once more, but still distrustful of the wife of the man from Utah.

But the woman seemed to have lost all her fierceness and was as quiet as a lamb, as if she were still under the spell of the man who had wrecked what might have been a happy life.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BRANDED ATHLETE INTERFERES AGAIN.

THE whole camp soon knew that Mormon Sol had recovered his wife.

There was a good deal of speculation as to what would happen next, and some said that the Mormon should not be permitted to take the woman back to the slavery of the life from which she had fled.

Thirza seemed completely under the mysterious spell which Sol had made use of in Buzzard Ben's shanty, and this mystified the camp still more. She showed no disposition to break away from him nor to appeal for help to a lot of men who hated Mormonism. On the contrary, she appeared as docile as a lamb, and those who saw her as she stood in the doorway of the cabin which Murad had given to Mormon Sol, wondered by what means he had won her back to him.

It was the night after the apparent reconciliation, and Diamond Don, standing on the street, saw a figure gliding toward the house occupied by Thirza.

The cat-like movements of the person attracted him, and looking with all eyes, he made out the subtle form of the Chinaman.

"I believe Wun Look is actually putting eyes into his fingers' ends, for he apparently knows where he is going and keeps straight ahead as if he could see," said the Ferret Sport. "He seems to be heading for Thirza's shanty, but it can't be that he knows where she is."

On went the gliding figure of the sightless Celestial, carefully regarded by the man who had discovered him, and when Diamond Don saw the yellow man gain a certain point which left his destination beyond the pale of doubt, he went forward to see what was up.

But there was another person who, unseen by Diamond Don, had also observed the strange journey of the Chinaman.

This was no less a personage than Lady Jezebel, and not seeing Sparkler, she crept toward the wife's house, but with her eyes riveted upon the pagan.

Wun Look gained the door and felt for the latch.

The woman inside sprung across the room and prevented him from opening it.

"You are in there?" said Wun Look with his lips close to the portal.

"Who are you?"

"I am Wun Look, the sightless. I am the man who lost his eyes at the hand of a demon in white."

"I don't know you."

"You don't? Think. Think of years ago when the yellow men of Utah hunted down the ten murderers of the Dead Buttes."

Thirza lost color as if the words had recalled something fearful; but she did not open the door.

"I can't let you in."

The form of Wun Look straightened alongside the door.

"A time may come when you will be glad to open the door to the blind man," he said with some bitterness. "I will put eyes in my fingers and they shall see for me."

There was no reply to this.

Standing a moment longer at the door, the yellow man turned back and went off.

He was seen to grope his way toward his own shanty, but he did not enter it.

"Disappointed," said Diamond Don to himself. "The little man is mad. If one could be near him now he would hear his teeth snap, and there would be a clenching of hands. What will he do next?"

All at once Wun Look turned toward Brushwood's as if certain sounds emanating from that place had caught his ear, and in another minute he was moving upon the scene of his vigils over the card tables.

The Sparkling Sport followed him.

Wun Look entered the den and came down the narrow aisle watched for a moment by the tenants of the place. The bandage was still over the last mutilated eye, but the rest of his face was visible, and it seemed to wear a smile of grim delight.

Reaching the counter, the Chinaman drew his figure up, and leaned on the edge of the board while he turned his face toward the man behind the bar.

"What is it, Wun Look?" asked this person.

The yellow face suddenly bent over the counter, and the voice that answered was couched in a whisper.

"Is he in?"

"Is who in?"

"Mormon Sol."

The barkeeper threw a look over his patrons.

"He ain't here," he said.

"Has he been in?"

"Not to-night."

"But he comes, don't he?"

"Not often."

Just then a man who was at one of the tables threw down his cards and, rising, stood for a moment with his face turned toward the Chinaman.

"Blind or not, he breaks the game for me every time," he scowled. "That yellow lynx has been my evil genius ever since he set foot in Moonstone and I have lost my last dollar again."

The quick ears of Wun Look caught every word, but he did not show by any sign that he was afraid.

He seemed to know that he was the person referred to by the speaker, for, turning his face to the man behind the bar, he smiled and then faced the tall person who was coming down the aisle with his hands shut and his red beard parted in the center.

Everybody looked for a scene, for Buzzard Ben had sworn openly that he intended to chastise the Chinaman if he ever interfered in his game, and, superstitious, like thousands of his class, he was ready to believe that Wun Look's coming to the place had spoiled his luck.

All at once the hand of Buzzard Ben fell upon the Chinaman's shoulder and the two stood face to face.

The difference in their heights was noticeable. The figure of Buzzard Ben towered like an oak above that of the Celestial, but the little man was well built and his physique denoted strength and activity.

"See here, this is to be the last time," fiercely said Ben, looking down into the face beneath him.

"The last time?" echoed the yellow man.

"Yes. I don't know how many times you have 'spelled' the cards in my hands and I have lost. It is the last time, I say. You go from Moonstone this minute, or thar will be a dead Chinaman what will never get back to the Flowery Kingdom."

The language was hot and merciless. The words fell from the lips of Buzzard Ben with all the malignity of a fiend, and his hand tightened on the shoulder it had clutched.

The crowd looked on.

"Come this way!" continued Ben, jerking the Chinaman from the counter and hustling him toward the door. "I am going to give you a start, and if you have eyes at the ends of your fingers you can find the way out of Moonstone."

The next moment, however, Wun Look braced himself and remained as immovable as a rock. The crowd burst into a laugh at Buzzard Ben's expense, which irritated the tough so that he jerked Wun Look forward and nearly lost his own footing.

Quick as a cat the Chinaman recovered and the following instant had broken from Ben's grasp.

A curse fell from the lips of the mad sport and rushing forward he seized the Celestial with both hands and dragged him toward the door.

Wun Look was practically helpless in the grasp of a man like the miner sport, and the silence of the crowd told that the sympathy was with Ben.

Half-way between the counter and the door stood a table, one leg of which the feet of the pagan struck, and the next moment he had clutched it with both hands.

"Table and all, then!" cried Buzzard Ben, seeing that he could not shake loose the grip of the determined Wun Look, and grasping him anew, he was in the act of dragging both the man and the table toward the door, when he was commanded to desist.

Looking up with an oath he saw in the door the handsome figure of Silver Steve.

"I would have bet on it," he exclaimed, glaring at the man who once before had come between him and the object of his vengeance. "You are this man's mascot, but you can't win here."

The form of Silver Steve came down the aisle, his eyes fastened on Buzzard Ben, and when he reached the combatants his hand touched the shoulder of the miner sport.

"This man is blind," said Steve, quietly.

"But he 'spells' my hand all the same. He hasn't lost his powers in that direction. He's got to go."

"Whither?"

"Out of camp—forever out of Moonstone City."

"When?"

"Now!"

"Without escort?"

"I don't care how he goes, but go he must."

The two white men stood face to face. The figure of Wun Look, still gripped by the bronzed hand of Buzzard Ben, crouched at the table with upturned face like a man awaiting his sentence.

He seemed to know who had come to his rescue, for the voice sounded familiar, and he listened with all the interest of one whose life was in the balance.

There was something in Silver Steve's eye that seemed to tell the Mormon's pard that he was in no trifling mood. Buzzard Ben took new breath and looked back at the crowd for encouragement.

"What makes this man your pard?" he asked with a latent sneer. "I would like to know what ever made you take up with a rat-eating pagan like the one who spells the cards of a gentleman and breaks them when they would otherwise win nearly every play?"

"I am not his pard; but, as you already know, for I have told you, I am Wun Look's friend. If ever he needed friends it is now when the world is dark to him and when nearly every one is his enemy."

"Then, you don't want him to go into exile?"

"He is not going there," said Silver Steve, looking down once more at the Chinaman.

"Will you interfere?"

There was no reply, only the dropping of the Silver Sport's hand to the Celestial's shoulder where the hand of Buzzard Ben also rested.

"Give this man to me!"

Instantly eye met eye and the figure of Silver Steve seemed to lean toward the man whom he had addressed.

"Give him to you, eh? Why, you would set him up over some of the best of us. You have made him your pard, now get him out of my hands if you can!"

The challenge in these words was not to be disregarded. It was plain and emphatic and the whole crowd understood what it meant.

Instantly the hand of Silver Steve went from Wun Look's shoulder to Buzzard Ben's hand. In another moment the grip of the miner-sport was

broken and he was thrown headlong across the table by the Branded Sport.

It was the work of an instant, but it showed what Silver Steve could do when aroused, and as Buzzard Ben gathered himself up and came forward, his hand on the butt of a half-drawn revolver, he was covered by the finger of his antagonist.

"I want the blood of no man, but the hand that is lifted against Wun Look is lifted against me!" said Steve.

The mad man stopped.

He seemed to know that to rush on would be to meet again the hand which had hurled him across the tables as though he were a youth, and not a giant. He looked at the cool sport holding the wrist of Wun Look while he took in the scene, and suddenly turning toward the expectant crowd, he said through shut teeth:

"If you kin afford to protect Chinamen, all right. But the time will come when that yellow dog will be alone, and then, then let him look out!"

At this juncture the figure of Wun Look broke from Silver Steve's grasp, and locating Buzzard Ben by the sound of his voice, he came toward him like a wounded mountain lion.

The way was open to the Celestial, and the distance very short.

Silver Steve would have arrested Wun Look, but could not, and as he waited for the meeting which was unavoidable, for Buzzard Ben had stopped with cocked revolver, all he could do was to cover him.

But even this was vain work, for all at once Ben caught the pagan and lifting him by main strength, he threw him like a ball at the man who had championed his cause.

Wun Look, cue and all, flashed through the air for the briefest space of time, and then was caught by the iron hands of Silver Steve who held him above his head in full view of all.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SECRET MISSION.

If it had not been that the feelings of the breathless crowd were with Buzzard Ben in his war against the Chinaman, there would have been an outburst of applause over the Branded Athlete's dexterity, but, as it was, silence followed the catch, and for a little while the whole set looked on without even a smile.

Silver Steve did not lower Wun Look until he saw that Ben did not intend to resume the attack, and when he put him down the bland man turned to him with a smile of gratitude.

"Some other time. Yes, we'll meet again," growled Buzzard Ben, at which Silver Steve looked at him and promptly answered:

"Now, if you say so."

Instead of accepting the challenge implied in these words, Buzzard Ben turned away and walked toward the spectators. Steve, with his hand on Wun Look's arm, took him out, and near the door said in low tones:

"You must not tempt these men too much. They are your enemies, and, headed by Buzzard Ben, they are apt to do you some injury."

"I went in there to find him," said the Celestial.

"Mormon Sol?"

"The snake from Utah!"

"You will find him soon enough, perhaps. Don't seek a quarrel. You may not be able to put eyes in your fingers as you think. Things are getting a little desperate. Don't tempt the gods too far."

The two friends walked down the street, watched by a pair of keen black eyes from one of the shanties, and when the Chinaman reached home, and was no longer with Silver Steve, the owner of the eyes laughed wickedly.

"There was a scene at Brushwood's—I know there was. But it wasn't my trap this time. I didn't set it for the blind Chinaman; but some time I will set a snare for him, and when he falls into it there will be no escape. I will see to that."

Lady Jezebel went to the table in the middle of the room from whose window she had watched the Branded Athlete and his friend, and looked at the young girl who occupied another chair near by.

"Do you think you could keep house for a day or so?" she suddenly asked.

Amber looked up.

"Are you going away?" she asked.

"Yes."

"When?"

"Maybe before morning."

A look of wonder came into the girl's eyes, but she said nothing.

"Don't play any hands while I am gone, for everything will be reported to me," continued Lady Jezebel. "I am going off for a few hours, but I will leave spies behind."

"Why spies?"

"To watch the men who are against us."

"Do you mean Mormon Sol?"

"That man is against nearly every one," exclaimed the Queen of Moonstone.

"I don't like him. I never did," answered Amber.

"But that is no reason why you should not watch the snake from Mormondom," was the quick reply. "Listen to me, girl. I am going

away; but some one will be near you to protect you."

"To protect me?" said Amber, with a strange look.

"Yes, yes; I mean what I say—to protect you."

Lady Jezebel rose and went to the door. The watchful girl saw her look down the street and then cast a glance at the sky, as if trying to forecast the weather. When she shut the door she came across the room and bent over the white face at the table.

"I won't be gone long—not longer than two days at the furthest," she said. "There are several men in camp whom you can trust during my absence; Murad is one of them—"

"Murad, the Mysterious?"

"Yes. He is not as black as he is painted. Trust that man implicitly. He will not fail you in the hour of need, and, then, he is all-powerful here, and the machinations of the Mormon will not avail when he is your friend."

"But why should Mormon Sol play a hand against me? He has found his runaway wife—"

The movement of Lady Jezebel toward the door broke the girl's sentence, and the next moment Amber was quite alone.

"She is going away, she says? Why? What takes her from Moonstone at this time? And why does she hint that I have something to fear from Mormon Sol?"

There came no answers to these questionings of the perturbed girl, and she heard the footsteps of Lady Jezebel die away in the street beyond the shanty.

If she could have followed the woman she would have seen her enter the house of Murad, the Mogul, and appear almost suddenly to that person in one of the rooms.

"I am ready. Are you?" she said.

The Mogul of Moonstone looked up with a smile, and seemed to read determination in the face that regarded him.

"I am ready, woman," he said. "There must be no failure here. It is now or never."

"I know that."

Murad took from his bosom a packet which he extended, and which was eagerly clutched by Lady Jezebel.

"It isn't a very far ride, but the trails are winding and somewhat dangerous. You will have to follow the river and then cut off into the gulch country."

"Yes, but the trail is not easily lost," put in the woman, whose eyes fairly shone.

"By heavens! I believe you are really anxious to undertake the mission."

"I am."

"Then see that you carry out the plot," was the reply. "On the other hand, I will take care of things here."

"Watch the Mormon."

"I will more than watch him. I will tie that man's hands if necessary."

"Don't lose sight of the two pards—Diamond Don and Silver Steve."

"I will watch them also."

"And the Chinaman—"

"What! are you still afraid of that blind man?" laughed Murad, the Mysterious.

"Not so much afraid of him as I hate him!" cried Lady Jezebel. "I know what he is and what he knows. Now I am off. When I come back I will have news."

"I hope so; and when you return, I hope to have things in better shape here—to have the Mormon back on the road to Mormondom and the hands of the pards tied on their backs."

Lady Jezebel held out her dainty hand, which Murad pressed for a moment, and when he released it she turned away and was gone. He heard her shut the door and then went back to the chair.

"She is determined to carry out the play, and she will do it if possible. It is the only way by which I can break the rising power of my enemies, the only plan by which I can hold my own, for I know what will happen if we fail."

Lady Jezebel proceeded to a small stable attached to Murad's house and took out a black horse, lithe of limb and sleek of coat. Mounting him with the ease of a person who knew how to ride, she rode slowly out of Moonstone, nor increased her gait until she reached a point from whence she could look back and see the last lights of the mountain capital.

"I will come back. Dead or alive, I will return, for all the powers that be cannot keep me back! I am in this game to the bitter end. They want him—they are trying to fasten the coils of evidence against the man whose secret wife I am, and yet he hesitates to use his power. He has but to put forth his hand to crush the conspiracy; he could call for aid and the men of Moonstone would come to the rescue; but he will not. Diamond Don has played in the dark until now. What I heard when I listened beneath his window tells me who and what he is. This man is nothing more than a detective, and he is wrapping the coils of a dark crime around Murad, my husband. Shall he succeed? Shall he reach the end of his trail victorious?"

She turned away from the lights and galloped down the trail. She left the shanties of Moonstone behind her and rode on and on until the stars no longer saw her among the gulches

of the wild country. Lady Jezebel was playing a hand for the safety of Murad, the Mogul, and was risking her life, as she well knew, for the man whose wife she was, though she knew that his hand was one which had been turned against his fellow-man.

Back in Moonstone, the scene of exciting events, a man with a smooth face and intensely black eyes was watching the creeping figure of a woman who had stolen from a cabin and was making its way across the edge of the Square, towards Wun Look's shanty.

"She is going to visit that Chinaman," said the watcher. "She is going to console the yellow serpent, and, perhaps, to hatch some new plot against me. I brought Lady Jezebel to terms, and now I will show the nestling that I am not without power here."

Mormon Sol continued to watch the figure awhile longer, when he darted forward and arrested its progress so suddenly that a slight cry was the result, and when he looked into the face before him he saw the staring eyes of Amber.

"By what right do you stop me?" cried the girl, drawing back as if the presence of the Mormon was loathsome.

"By the right of might, my child, if by no other one," he answered. "You are going to see the enemy of the American race, the soulless Mongolian, who ought to be despised by every white man."

"I am going to see Wun Look," was the quick response. "I have nothing to conceal."

"But, first, let me talk a moment. I am called Mormon Sol—"

"I know—the wife-hunter of Utah! You are hated by women wherever you are known, and the wretched creature who by some means was thrown back into your power, despises you, while she is apparently powerless to defend herself."

The look which Amber received from the man who clutched her arm was dark enough, but he did not release her.

"You don't seem to like Mormon Sol," he said.

"Like a man like you? I should say not."

"But you may in time change your estimate of me."

In an instant the girl recalled Lady Jezebel's words. This man was her enemy. She knew that he was the keeper of some secret which had caused Lady Jezebel to hate him, yet at the same time he had forced her to divulge Thirza's hiding-place. What was it?

"I must go to Wun Look. The poor wretch's eye may need attention. He used to bring me flowers from the mountain—"

"A thousand curses on the head of every pagan!" broke in Mormon Sol.

"The race must have injured you at some time. Your hatred is too deeply seated to be a thing of to-day alone. What did Wun Look ever do to you, Mormon Sol?"

The man from Utah seemed to turn pale. He stepped between Amber and the Chinaman's shanty, and with his eye fixed upon her, said, in almost hissing tones:

"Never mind. We will settle that between ourselves, but if you go to him now you will curse the hour that opened to you the door of the sightless pagan."

"Then, the woe may come! I am Wun Look's friend, through thick and thin," and breaking from the Mormon's grasp, Amber turned away and was watched until she had passed the threshold of the cabin of darkness.

"I will see her by-and-by," growled the Mormon. "I will know what she means by sticking so close to this pagan. Lady Jezebel has just played a new hand by riding out of camp on Murad's horse. What does that mean?"

He turned toward the house of the Mogul and went in without so much as a knock.

"So you have sent her off, eh?" he said with a leer in the eyes that glittered underneath the bushy brows of black as he appeared suddenly to the Mysterious who started at sight of him.

"What means this? You send your wife out of camp on your horse. You intrust her with a secret mission. Not long ago we agreed that we could not afford to be enemies, yet you do this thing."

The table was between them, and the two men looked across it into each other's faces.

"Yes, Lady Jezebel is out with my consent," said Murad with some resolution. "I even sent her to the trail."

"To the trail, eh?"

"To the trail which leads to the Camp of the Ten Shanties."

The look that came to the Mormon's face was a surprised one.

"Fool!" he cried. "There is a man near who could answer all your questions. Besides, she can't reach the old camp inside of ten days."

"She won't be gone over two."

"Then," cried the Mormon, "you have broken your word with me."

CHAPTER XV.

THE LION AND HIS MATE.

MURAD, the Mysterious, finding himself alone again after the interview with Mormon Sol, walked the floor awhile and then sat down.

Reaching up, he pulled a cord that hung from

the ceiling, and a man who stood in the office of one of the mines owned by the Mogul started and smiled. In a short time he was on his way to the house, and when he stood in Murad's presence the Mysterious said:

"You heard the bell, eh, Parker?"

Parker nodded and looked at the Mogul.

There was eagerness in Murad's eyes, and for some time he looked at the man he had called in and kept silent.

"You have seen this man, Mormon Sol, Parker?"

"I have seen him."

"What do you think of him?"

"About as much as the rest of the camp does, and that is not much."

"Then he isn't liked?"

"We never could get to liking Mormons in Moonstone."

"He has found his wife," said Murad.

"Yes, and the strangest part of it is, that she doesn't try to run off again."

The Mogul of Moonstone said nothing.

"She lives in the house to which you assigned the Mormon after the recovery, and seems contented, for one of the boys heard her singing in the shanty."

A smile was seen to flit across the Mogul's face.

"Parker," he said, leaning toward the man who watched him, "what else have you seen besides Thirza's apparent contentment?"

"Not much. You know I am mostly on duty in the mines and that when I am out I am at home. But I know that something is going on between other people—that Diamond Don and Silver Steve are as thick as hops, and that the Branded Athlete goes often to Diamond's house which he did not do a few weeks ago."

"Then you have used your eyes to advantage," said Murad. "You have seen what has been seen by others, but you may have seen more than they."

"I don't know about that, Captain Murad."

"Parker, I want you outside of the mine. Listen. I am in danger."

"You? In danger in Moonstone?"

"Yes. This man, Mormon Sol, is a serpent in the grass and the plot against me is a double one."

Parker looked surprised, but did not speak, preferring to let Murad go on as he thought best.

"I have secrets which I have been keeping from all of you and I may keep them still," continued the Mysterious. "But for all this, I am in need of help. I could go out and face them all, but I don't desire to do this. Mormon Sol, who left this house within the last half hour, has grown insolent in his demands—"

"Does the Mormon demand so-and-so?" cried the miner, his hands shutting in indignation.

"Yes. He comes to me and says that unless I do so-and-so he will play against me a certain hand which he thinks holds all the trumps in the deck."

"Who is this man, Captain Murad?"

Murad, the Mysterious, fell back and gazed at the miner. Tell him who Mormon Sol was?—show Parker the true face of this man who had invaded Moonstone from Mormondom? No, the time had not come for that; but he would arm himself against the snake and when the time arrived, he would show him that Murad, the Mysterious, was still a power among those whom he called his own.

The Mogul did not keep Parker unemployed very long, for, glancing at his watch, he crossed the room, motioning for the miner to follow.

All at once Murad stooped and lifted a door in the floor.

"Go down; I will follow," he said to the man at his heels. "This is one of the secrets I have kept from you all, but the time has come for its revelation."

Parker climbed down into the opening and soon found himself in a corridor with Murad near by.

"This is the highway to the modern Ophir," said the Mysterious. "I came to Moonstone with this secret in my keeping and erected my house over the mouth of the old mine. This is the secret which the old alcaldes held long ago, but it is mine now, for they died without revealing it with the tongue, though a singular old map which fell into my hands gave me the clew, and following it up I discovered this mine to be richer than its first discoverers imagined. We will go on."

Murad guided the miner down into the mine and at last stopped in a chamber whose walls bore marks of old-style mining. The exclamations which fell every now and then from Parker's lips told how rich in wealth the mine was, and when he stood in the light of Murad's torch and looked his master in the eye, he broke out into expressions of wonder.

"This is worth fighting for, eh, Parker?" said Murad. "This is worth struggling to hold against them all, isn't it?"

"It is worth dying for!" was the answer. "I never saw anything like this. It is a golden dream such as no man ever thought of. But who seeks to rob you of this bonanza?"

"Ah, who does not?" cried Murad. "They are all against me. They conspire to wreck

from me this mine of untold wealth, and chiefest among them are Diamond Don and Silver Steve."

"And Mormon Sol?"

"The Mormon is not after the mine so much as he is after me personally."

"You knew this man before he came to Moonstone after the runaway wife?"

"I did! I knew him in another part of the country."

Murad was leaning against the wall of the chamber with his eyes riveted upon Parker who was deeply interested in everything he saw and heard.

"I want to catch them all," continued the Mogul through his teeth. "I want to trap the trio."

"I understand. You want to beat them all—to hold the mine in which we stand."

"Precisely."

"Call on me, for this bonanza is worth fighting for. The boys will stand by you. What do you propose? A quick play and a handful of deadly trumps?"

There was an eager, malicious glitter in the speaker's eyes and Murad, the Mysterious, saw that he had won him over to any desperate undertaking he wished to propose.

"I want the trap to work without any fear of failure," he went on. "There must be no false play, and when the jaws close on the prey they must hold it."

"You set the trap and we will see that it is sprung."

"I will do that. Somewhere in this mine is a dungeon which the old workers of it used for the purpose of a prison. I found it once and think I know how to reach it again."

Murad led Parker off in another direction and stopping at length held his torch above his head and showed the miner a door set in the wall and still in a remarkable state of preservation.

Parker went forward and was about to speak to Murad when something large fell upon him and bore him against the wall.

There was a flash of hair in the light of the Mogul's torch and then the fierce glitter of a pair of eyes, and the astonished Murad to his horror saw Parker trying to tear himself loose from the teeth of a mountain lion!

The sight of the miner in the grip of the ferocious beast was enough to send a thrill through the Mysterious and he almost dropped the torch in his eagerness to draw his revolver and rush to Parker's assistance.

"Help! help!" cried the miner. "The teeth of the beast are meeting in my shoulder!"

Murad sprang forward and dropping the torch on the ground whipped out his knife, and clutching the animal under the throat, tried to stab it with the keen blade. But this was easier planned than done, for the lion was a large one and was tearing at Parker's shoulder while the miner struggled all he could in the monster's grip.

Presently all three rolled to the ground together, and Murad, still fighting both for himself and Parker, found himself underneath and nearly exhausted. It was a desperate struggle for life in the dark, for they had rolled across the torch putting it out, while they could not see anything for the gloom that prevailed.

Murad at last found the side of the lion and drove the knife home with all his might. It was a blow calculated to loosen the monster's teeth, but it did not, for a cry from Parker told Murad that the animal was still in the contest.

Again and again Murad struck with the knife, twisting it in the vitals of the lion, and every now and then gouging it deeper and deeper in search of the heart. Never before had he seen one of these animals so tenacious of life, and when his hand grew weary and he found that Parker was still in the toils, he fell off, cursing the nine-lived beast and ready to give up the battle.

With his clothing torn, Murad rose and stood against the wall. He still heard Parker's groans at his feet and venturing to strike a lucifer, he looked down.

The sight that he beheld was appalling, for there lay both the miner and the beast, the teeth of the latter fastened in the miner's flesh and his eyes staring at the chamber wall with the glare of the dead.

Murad stooped and bent over the man in the grasp of the lion. He saw that he was beyond help. Parker was dead, the lion was dying from the knife-stabs, and Murad, shutting his teeth hard, drove the blade once more into the tawny hide and twisted it there with the fury of a fiend.

At last with a new lot of matches in his hands he rolled the beast from the body of his victim and wondered how the animal could have entered the mine.

He was thinking out this puzzle as well as he could when a short growl startled him and he turned with a cry.

"The mate—the lioness!" cried Murad.

Crouching near him with her tail describing circles in the air was a huge mountain lioness with her baleful eyes fixed upon him and her teeth showing like those of a skull.

She looked larger than her dying lord and

Murad, falling back from the sight—he could not help it—stood for a moment like a man in a maze without so much as drawing a single weapon.

He saw the lioness creep forward with the noiselessness of a serpent. Her eyes flashed fire as she came on and, with her beautiful neck touching the ground and her velvet paws pushed forward one at a time as she prepared for the upward spring, Murad could not but admire the beast though he knew that a dreadful battle for the mastery was near at hand.

With his nerves at tension he braced himself for the ordeal and watched the lioness as she crept nearer and nearer. Although he was armed with a revolver, he discarded it and boldly confronted the beast with the knife about whose hilt he wound his dark brown hand.

"Why don't you come at me?" said Murad, by way of a challenge.

The lioness answered him with a short growl and leaped forward, her mouth wide open and her eyes ready, as it seemed, to fly from her head.

Murad, the mysterious, threw out one hand and made a grab for the throat as it was seen for a moment by the flare of the matches he had flung at his feet, and as he felt the beast's skin, he struck at the heart with all his might.

A howl from the lioness told that the keen blade had sunk home, and sinking her teeth into Murad's arm she tried to wrench it from its socket. The Mogul of Moonstone felt a sudden faintness as the pain became intense, but bracing himself anew with resolution not to give up, he sought for another opportunity to repeat his first blow with deadlier effect.

Not to fall with the lioness was his resolution, for he did not want a hand-to-hand conflict on the ground where Parker had received his death-wounds.

All at once the maddened beast fell from Murad and ran off. Turning in the light of the little torch, she looked at him and seemed to send forth a challenge from her blazing eyes.

"I wonder why she dropped me so suddenly?" thought Murad.

The answer came quickly for he saw near the lioness two cubs not much larger than kittens and as they stopped and showed their little forms beside their mother, he knew that he was in more danger than before.

The next moment the lioness, pushing the kittens out of the road, came forward again, and just then Murad's torch expired and he found himself in the dark with the mad creature facing him, and heard the grinding of teeth as she crept over the blood-marked floor of the corridor.

"This time it means death for one or both of us," said the Mogul, and feeling the edge of his knife, he put himself in an attitude of defense and awaited the onset.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DESPERATE PLAY.

HALF-SECONDS seemed hours to the man waiting in the dark for the spring of the lioness. There was something terrible in the silence which had followed the last growl, and Murad the Mysterious stood along the wall, clutching the knife and wondering when the beast would leave the floor and make the leap.

He dared not strike another match, but waited with his heart in his throat and his fingers sinking into the hilt of the knife, as it were, as he counted his pulse-beats with the uncertainty of life emphasized by the situation.

At last the animal, near enough all the time, made the leap, and Murad was thrown back as if a log had been hurled against him.

His hand was knocked aside as if the lioness had human hands; he was forced along the wall as he tried to get in a stroke, and when he managed to get loose, not from the mad beast but from the unyielding wall, he struck with all his might, and felt the blade sink into solid flesh.

The stroke brought a cry of pain from the lioness, but she did not relinquish the hold her teeth had obtained.

Murad went to his knees, striking madly in the gloom, and nearly every time feeling the knife pass beneath the dark hide of the wild creature. He fought as never man fought before and with the odds against him.

To perish there by tooth and claw meant the failure of all his hopes and plans. To lose the battle for life in the mine meant the triumph of Mormon Sol and the final victory of others whom he hated as much.

He thought of the woman he had sent to the trail, and muttered her name as he sent the knife home. He thought, too, of Amber, the angel of the camp; but his desire to live through that terrible struggle with the lioness did not tear loose the teeth that were buried in his arm.

All at once the wild beast fell from the man, and he staggered to his feet.

There was something between his feet, something that purred and crept in and out like kittens. The cubs had come back and they had attracted the mother's attention.

This sent a thrill of hope through Murad's frame.

The cubs had saved him!

He moved from the spot, still gripping the bloody blade and ready at a moment's warning to defend himself again.

Down the dark corridor he went, listening all the time for the growl that preceded the leaps, and with one hand thrown out as a guard and shield.

As he was permitted to move on without being molested, he began to think that the lioness had given up the contest, and was about to let out a sigh of relief, when he was struck by some descending body and thrown back once more.

This time, however, he was not caught by teeth or claw, but managed to pull loose and at the same time deal a blow that seemed fatal.

Something fell heavily at his feet and when he felt down he touched the quivering body of a huge animal. If he could have seen then—if he had possessed the eyes of the owl—he would have seen that the last stroke had been the really fatal one of the whole fight. It had reached the heart of the monster, for the lioness of the mine lay dead with two cubs licking her streaming wounds.

Murad, the Mysterious, rose and for a moment stood silent, but filled with thanks in the gloom of the cramped battle-ground.

He was victor, but at what cost?

Parker, killed by the lion, lay near, his eyes staring in death at the hard ceiling, and his enemy across his legs. Murad knew this and did not return to his companion.

After awhile he crept back to the opening, and from there made his way to the house above the mine.

When he presented himself in the light he was a picture of rags.

The claws of the lioness and her mate had rendered him unrecognizable to his friends, but fortunately none came in to see him in that plight.

Murad dressed his wounds as best he could and taking a draught of wine to cool his excited nerves, he went to his little room and sat down.

"Lady Jezebel would nearly turn back if she knew this," he muttered. "If she thought I had risked my life in the dark with a pair of mountain lions, she would not continue her mission. I have lost Parker, one of the best men in the camp. I would have confided everything to him; now there must be another man selected; but who will he be?"

He thought a moment, then, striking the table with his clinched hand, he cried out:

"Why not try Duke Gorman? Ah, why didn't I think of him first and let Parker live? Duke Gorman! It shall be Duke!"

Five minutes later a man who looked different from the one who at that very time lay dead with the mountain lion across his legs, came to the house, having been summoned thither by Murad, and stood in the Mogul's presence.

The miner, who was short and stout of limb, looked at the Mysterious and saw the long scratch on the left cheek, the autograph of the old lioness.

"No questions, Duke, my boy," said the Mogul, with a smile. "I have just passed through a little episode which I don't want repeated. I may tell you by and by, but now—"

He leaned across the table and for a moment studied the nearly smooth face before him.

"Duke, you know this man, Mormon Sol?" began Murad.

"I have seen the serpent."

"Rightly named. He is a serpent whose sting is death if he gets a chance at you. You know him I say."

"Do you think that when I was in Utah I associated with this man?"

"I don't say that. You left the land of the Saints before you associated with any one in particular."

"Never mind that. I left before they caught me," grinned Duke Gorman. "I went thar for a purpose, accomplished it, and got away with my life; that was doing pretty well, eh, Captain Murad?"

Murad nodded and went on:

"This man is here for a purpose."

"Yes, he came for his runaway wife."

"Having been successful, why don't he take her back?"

The little man said nothing for a moment. He seemed to see that there was something more than had come out, behind the words he had just heard.

"He don't want to take her back," he said. "In fact, he doesn't seem to care so much for Thirza the Sixth, as he calls her, now that he knows where she is."

"You think so, Duke?"

"It looks that way to me, anyhow."

"You are right. This man never cared for the woman he was looking for. He would not have shed a tear if the wolves had found her somewhere in the mountains. This man, Mormon Sol, thinks he will some day be Mogul of Moonstone."

Duke Gorman started and clinched his hands.

"Mogul here?" he cried.

"Yes."

The eyes of the little man seemed to change color. His face was white with passion, and as

Murad watched him he seemed to lose the old light of his deep-set orbs, and get one of another and fiercer kind.

"I have found my man," said Murad to himself. "I have discovered in Duke Gorman the very man I have been looking for."

Then he bent forward and continued:

"I don't want any quarrel with this man, but I don't want him here. You must know that a man who wants to be Mogul of Moonstone has no business in this camp."

"I know that."

"Give him a show—let him have string, and he may play a dangerous hand, no matter how secure we think our rights are. These Mormons are as cunning as serpents, and as dangerous as vipers. You don't know where they are going to bite, nor when. They glove their hands until you think everything is as soft as silk, but in the end they sting you, and you awake to the pain of the wound all too late. It is death—death—Duke Gorman—to give men of Mormon Sol's stamp a single inch of rope."

"I know that. I have seen the Mormon at home, and I know what he is capable of."

"I am glad of that. I want a friend of experience. I want to have at my elbow a thoroughly reliable man who has nerves of steel, and hands of iron."

"I think I have the latter anyway," and the bronzed hands of Duke Gorman came up over the edge of the table and were exhibited in the lamp-light.

"I want this man watched and, if necessary, insulted," said Murad, the Mysterious. "It must be done within the next five hours."

"I thought Lady Jezebel intended to get rid of him."

"This is not a woman's battle," put in the Mogul of Moonstone. "It is a fight between man and man. It is a battle for self-preservation and my life is worth more—to me at least—than ten thousands lives like his."

The little man stood erect and seemed to await the issuance of orders.

"I want Mormon Sol insulted, but the man who does it must act promptly and have a cool head."

Duke Gorman nodded.

"I want him called Don Serpent. Don't forget the name. I want some one to face him and covering him with a hand, call him Don Serpent, the branded."

A curious smile came across Duke Gorman's cheek.

"Will he start at this? Will he resent the name?" he asked.

"Try him!" laughed Murad.

"By Jove! I will if you want me to," he exclaimed. "I will face Mormon Sol and give him the name full in his teeth. I will call him Don Serpent and never take water, no matter how he receives the challenge."

"He will resent it," said Murad, quietly. "He will draw if he has a particle of manhood about him. He will show you the muzzle of the Mormon revolver. You will have to fight him, but you are quick, Duke Gorman."

The small man bowed. He knew himself that he was quick with the six-shooter. There was a wild story that he had dropped three men in bewildering succession and then effected his escape from a Mormon mob, and those who knew Duke Gorman knew that he could handle the deadly revolver with the swiftness of a look.

"Within the next five hours, eh?" asked the little man, leaning toward Murad.

"Within the next five hours, or before daylight," was the reply.

"Don Serpent the Branded? I don't know what that means, but I don't care. All I want to know is that it means that he once sailed under that name and that is enough. He will fight you say, captain? He will resent the name you have spoken? That will do. I shall face him at the first opportunity. By Jove! I will hunt him up and bestow upon him the title you have just given him."

The eyes of Murad, the Mysterious, seemed to gleam with fiendishness. They looked into the face before him and made a brief study of the half dwarfish figure at the table.

"If you succeed there will be no trial," he said to the little man.

"Thanks," said Duke Gorman. "I will succeed."

The dark hand of the pigmy touched the broad-brimmed hat he wore, and in another moment his back was turned to the man who had sent him on the mission of insult, if not of death.

"A better man—a deadlier shot I could not have sent to this work," muttered Murad as he listened to the vanishing footsteps of Duke Gorman. "Something will come of this. He is quicker than Parker. He would have killed the lioness; Parker was killed by it. Duke is sure and fatal. There will be a meeting, a shot and a dead Mormon."

The Mogul of Moonstone went back to the room where he sometimes received Lady Jezebel when she came on her secret visits to the house. He was alone and the hour was getting late.

"I would like to follow him," he said aloud. "I would like to see the meeting. But there will be quick work, and when all is over I will make Duke Gorman a nabob."

He did not see the figure which at that very moment was leaning against the house on the outside with an ear glued to the window sill, as it were. He did not know that human ears had overheard the most of the conversation between him and the little man. If he had gone to the window after Duke's departure, he might have seen gliding from the house a figure that moved curiously along, a creeping form and a pair of hands feeling the ground over which it went; and if he had looked sharper, he would have seen the braided cue of a pagan.

CHAPTER XVII.

THIRZA TELLS HER STORY.

THIRZA, the hunted wife of Mormon Sol, stood at the window of the little house which had become her home since falling back into the hands of the Saint, and was looking out at the half-lighted square of the camp.

There was a dark ring under each eye, and about the lips was an expression of sorrow which nothing could obliterate. She had not been mistreated since becoming once more the slave of Mormon Sol. Indeed, she had been neglected, but this was to her notion and she was willing to remain neglected by him while she stayed in Moonstone.

Suddenly there came in sight, his tall handsome figure easily seen by Thirza, a man who seemed headed for the house. He came on, watched by the woman, who drew back and looked to the fastenings of her door when it seemed to her that his destination was the house, and that, if she liked, she could have an interview with Silver Steve.

The Branded Athlete came up with Thirza looking at him from the middle of the chamber, and when he knocked she could not control herself, but opened the door to him.

What did he want with her? What had brought this man whom she had barely spoken to since her betrayal by Lady Jezebel to her?

She saw Silver Steve shut the door, and then watched him as he touched his hat to her and came forward.

"I am unexpected?" said the athlete. "I don't come to you to make light of your situation; but I am here for a purpose."

She did not speak.

"You want to get out of the clutches of the monster. You want to hide again."

"Who told you so, Silver Steve?"

"No one. It is natural. You are not happy here; you are still the wife of Mormon Sol."

"I am still his wife by the rites of the Mormon Church. I am still his slave."

She spoke the last words with bitterness.

"Then, of course, you want to get away," said Steve. "You are anxious to get out of his hands and I have come to show you the way to freedom."

"You?" she cried, starting slightly forward. "You show me the way to liberty? I have been cajoled and promised before. The woman who betrayed me promised on her oath to show me the road out of the net, but she handed me back to slavery, and here I am, still the wife of the man from Utah."

There was no reply for a moment, but Silver Steve was watching her all the time.

"If you do not care to trust me, a Mormon-hater, I cannot convince by any other means that I am sincere in my offers of assistance," he answered.

"Forgive me. I can't think of having any one risk their lives for me," cried Thirza. "I am but a foolish woman who, like the moth, flew too near the flame. You don't want to risk your life to save me, Silver Steve?"

"There will be no risk about it if you are willing and will obey me. I am here to offer you freedom and, what is more, the man who hunted you down is playing another game, and he will not look after you so assiduously this time as the last."

Thirza looked at Silver Steve like a woman in a maze.

"What do you mean? It can't be true that after all the trouble I caused Mormon Sol, he will give me up and let you or some other man conduct me out of his reach."

"It is quite true. Mormon Sol, as you should know from your unfortunate associations with him, is a man of subtle plots and deep cunning. He is engaged in a game which, if it should win, will get him another wife—"

"In this camp?" and the thin hand of Thirza sunk into Silver Steve's arm. "In this camp, do you say, Silver Steve? Tell me the truth, that I may warn his new victim, and help to break the net he may be weaving for her."

The figure of the Branded Athlete fell back, dragging the excited Thirza after him.

"Leave the warning to others," he said. "Others will see that the fly is not drawn into the web."

"But others cannot warn from experience; they don't know the ways of a man like Mormon Sol."

Gently disengaging her hand, Silver Steve looked Thirza in the eye and went on:

"Whether you take me up or not, you are not

to fall entirely into the old net of slavery. You know something about this man who calls you his sixth wife."

"Alas! I know nothing good of him."

"I thought so. When did you first meet him?"

The woman hesitated.

What! go back and tell this man all about her lost life? Tell him how she had been deluded by the showy tinsel of Mormonism—how she, a fair young girl, had been taken in by the Saints of the branded Territory, and how she had spent there a wretched life with but few moments of sunlight or genuine pleasure?

"Thirza, I don't want the story of your life," said Silver Steve, as if he could read what was passing through her mind at that very moment. "I want to know something about Mormon Sol."

She was silent.

"You can separate the histories, can't you?" he went on. "You don't have to reveal your own life in telling me something about this man."

"I might do it that way," she said in low tones.

Silver Steve folded his arms and leaned against the logs at his back. Then, looking at Thirza, the wife, he waited for her to tell him anything she cared to.

For a little while Thirza was silent, then passing her hand across her brow to brush back a strand of dark hair, she began:

"I first saw Mormon Sol in St. Louis. It was ten years ago, when I was the happy inmate of a little home. He came to us in the guise of a man of God, and his specious tale was the entering wedge to our friendship. I was then living with my mother, who was a widow, and when we listened to the carefully-spun doctrines of Mormon Sol, we did it without suspecting that we would be drawn into the vortex like thousands of other victims. He played upon our sympathies like the cunning man that he is; step by step he led us both to the brink, and even when we stood there and looked down into the abyss, we did not realize our situation."

"One day our eyes were opened, but it was not until I was far from the old home and in the clutches of the Mormon. That part of my life seems some terrible dream from which there is no awakening. As time passed I came to know more about the man who had enmeshed me. I picked up something about his past, for at one time I determined to break the slavery of wifehood by a deed which should startle the whole country; but I did not. I let it pass. I thought of the mother from whose embraces I had flown to become the mate of a serpent, and that stayed the hand which I had already armed. I became Thirza, the docile, instead of Thirza the Tigress."

"At last, when I could no longer endure the stain and crime of more than double wifehood, I fled, only to find the trailer on my track, and, as you know, to be betrayed by one of my own sex and remanded back for more suffering. That is my story, Silver Steve."

Thirza ceased and looked at the listening sport with a strange smile on her face.

"But you have told me very little about Mormon Sol," he said. "You have, in fact, told me nothing about his past, though you say that you know what it has been."

She looked at him a full minute before she spoke again. It seemed that she would not tell him more, but suddenly she put forth her hand and touched him.

"You want to know more, do you? You want to know what all this man has been?"

"Yes."

"Know, then, that he was once a man of the saddle—that there was a time when he was not Mormon Sol. He was a bandit."

"Mormon Sol, Thirza?"

"Yes. He led to many a dark raid and foray the desperate bandits of the Sand Hills. That is but one of the many chapters of his past. He graduated in many a school before he became Saint. He was also a member of Red Joachim's band."

"Not that bad, I hope," cried Silver Steve.

"Then, you have heard of Red Joachim?"

The hand of the Branded Sport went to his bosom, but suddenly rested there, yet Thirza had caught the movement.

"I know it," she said, with a nod. "Mormon Sol is branded on the bosom."

"What is the design?" eagerly asked Silver Steve.

"The letters are 'R. J.'—for 'Red Joachim,'" was the reply.

The Sport seemed to gasp for breath.

"You have seen the tattoo, have you?"

"More than once," said Thirza.

Silver Steve looked away as if afraid to trust his face in the searching light of her eyes.

"What else has this man been?"

"You want to know it all, I see. He once left Salt Lake and remained away nearly a year. He was East. I know it by the presents he brought back. He must have led a dual life wherever he was, for he had manners which were strange in the Mormon capital, and I discovered little secrets after his return which he would not have had found out for the world."

"Were any of these secrets connected with the life of another man?"

"Who told you that they were?" exclaimed the Mormon wife.

"Go on," was all the answer she got from Silver Steve.

"There was a letter which fell into his hands after his return to us—a letter which came from somewhere and which startled him while it seemed to give him great delight."

"Did you find it, Thirza?"

"No, but Delia, one of the other wives, did, and we read it together. We swore together never to reveal the contents of it for fear of the results, and from that day to this we have kept the wording of that terrible letter a dread secret in our hearts."

Silver Steve went toward the Mormon's wife and caught her hand. He brought his face so close to hers that she fell back and stared at him with eyes that seemed ready to start from her head.

"Was that letter in part a confession of the killing of a woman who was said to be in a mine from which she would never emerge until the blast of the Archangel's trumpet?"

A cry parted Thirza's lips and he would have fallen from Silver Steve's grip if he had not held her fast.

Her look was answer enough.

"It was that letter, wasn't it?" she went on. "You need not tell me more, Thirza. I know enough."

Her figure straightened in an instant.

"What are you going to do? You are more than Silver Steve and, with your friend Diamond Don, you are setting a trap for my—Mormon Sol," she finished.

"Not so much for Mormon Sol as for the other one," said Steve.

"What other one?" cried the woman. "In God's name, what is this mystery?"

She was not unmystified.

"When Mormon Sol came back from the East did he act like a man who had a fear treading in his wake?" asked the Branded Sport.

"He did appear ill at ease, but it was not until after he got that strange letter. He would come to the houses at night and stand in the light like a man in a fright."

"A pretty state of mind for a follower of Red Joachim!"

"Ah, you don't believe that the brand is on his bosom," cried Thirza. "As I live before Heaven, it is there, and the letters—the initials of the once famous mountain bandit—are to be seen over Mormon Sol's heart."

"I don't doubt your word, but you may misjudge this man, wretch as he is," remarked Silver Steve in changed voice. "Red Joachim may have placed that brand on his person to tell his victims."

"They tell me that the outlaw wore the brand himself and that his followers carried it on their breasts."

"Then," said Steve, "let him have the credit of being outlaw, the man of mystery and a Mormon Saint all at the same time. Good night, Thirza. You shall never feel again the hand of Mormon slavery unless you voluntarily seek it."

"That I will never do."

"The chain is broken. You are from this night free and Mormon Sol will never seek to take you back."

She looked at him as he went to the door and before she could stop the Branded Sport he had crossed the threshold and she saw his figure pass the window as he moved away.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW DUKE GORMAN CARRIED OUT HIS GAME.

WITHIN five hours!

That was the time allotted to Duke Gorman by Murad for the intended insult which was to rouse Mormon Sol and bring about an altercation which was expected to result disastrously to the man from Utah.

Gorman was heart and soul in the matter and when he walked from Murad's presence it was with the intention of doing just what he was expected to do—insult the Mormon and shoot him dead in his boots.

But a higher power than man disposes and brings about failures where success is looked for.

Duke Gorman, carrying on his person the deadliest revolver of Moonstone, went about looking for the man he was to insult and when he had located the tall form of the Mormon he drew back and studied out his part.

Mormon Sol stood beneath Brushwood's roof looking at a game progressing in that famous resort and was oblivious of the man who was gliding forward with evil intent.

The little man with the quick fingers stood for a while on the outside, looked through the open door and cautiously studied the ground before he took the decisive step. When he threw himself across the threshold and his little figure so well known to all the sports of the mountain camp was seen in the glow of the lamps, some looked up and wondered why he did not stop at one of the tables as was his wont and not look so closely at the Mormon.

Duke Gorman came forward until he stood so close to Mormon Sol that he could have touched

his sleeve without difficulty. Insult looked from his keen eyes, and when he leaned forward, and with his lips twitching under a certain nervousness he could not conceal, he hissed:

"Good-night to you, Don Serpent!"

The Mormon started, but did not turn upon him as Duke thought he would. That the name had thrilled him there was no doubt, but the sudden whirl was not there, and for a moment the little man thought that, after all, Murad had reckoned without his host.

But the Mormon's face had lost color. The name had pierced him like an arrow, and although he continued to eye the game at his elbow, it was evident that he had by a swift glance seen the man who had uttered it.

"Good-night, Don Serpent, I say," said Duke Gorman, a little louder. "I mean you, Mormon Sol."

This time there was no mistaking the significance of the nickname.

The men at the table looked up and caught the Mormon's face. At the same time they saw the lips of Duke Gorman quivering with the words he had just spoken.

"You mean me, do you?" suddenly said the man from Utah, turning for the first time upon the little figure of his insulter.

"I mean no one else," was the answer, while the hand of Duke touched the half-hidden butt of his six-shooter. "I mean you and no other person. You are a man of two names, and they don't know you here by your right one, which is Don Serpent, as I have said."

There was a sudden movement on the Mormon's part, and the hand of Murad's friend came up, but was caught by another as quick as it did, and the next instant Duke Gorman found his pistol-hand harmless, for the iron grip of the Mormon was at the wrist.

All this had not occupied the half of a second, and when the startled gamblers looked up they saw Duke Gorman biting through his lips, while the Mormon held him with the ease of a steel vise.

"He paid you for this, eh?" said Mormon Sol, with a smile, as he looked down into Gorman's face. "He told you to do this, and, slave-like, you came to me with the insult between your teeth."

"It's a lie! I know you for Don Serpent, and it didn't require any coaching."

Duke saw that he was fairly caught, and that unless he had help, or was released by the Mormon himself, he could not get loose from that relentless grip.

"He told you to do this, but never mind," continued the man from Utah. "I know that you came from his house, and that you promised him to carry out his wishes to the letter. I ought to kiss you in your boots."

The eyes of the speaker seemed to emit sparks of fire, and while he glared down into the face of the little man, those who looked on expected to see something tragic.

"Apologize," said the Mormon. "Say that you were sent to this place by the man you serve at all times. Tell it in presence of the pards of Moonstone—"

"I tell nothing!" savagely broke in the little man. "I am in no man's pay and, besides, why is it that you resent the name I have applied to you? Don Serpent! I repeat it without fear. When I call you by that name I name you rightly and you know it, though this camp may not."

The Mormon's grip seemed to tighten on Duke Gorman's wrist and he was borne back toward the wall. The Mormon looked at him with the coolness of a desperado and was the observer of all those who had stopped their games to witness the outcome of the singular meeting and accusation.

"You dare not unhand me," cried Duke Gorman, squirming in the dark man's grip. "You dare not give me a chance for my life but you hold me like a cat holds a mouse. Don Serpent, you are a coward, big as you are, and if you had your just deserts you wouldn't be here looking for a runaway wife, but the vultures of the southern valleys would have picked your bones years and years ago."

The next moment Duke Gorman was thrown from the Mormon's grasp and fell headlong against the wall beyond the tables. He alighted on his shoulders, and, not at all hurt though for the moment slightly stunned, he bounded up like a rubber ball and with a hissed oath turned and threw up his hand.

"Out of the way!" cried some one. "The Duke has a gun!"

Sure enough in the yellow hand of the little man shone the barrel of a revolver and before the Mormon could reach him there was a sharp report and the puff of white smoke for an instant hid the face of the wielder of the weapon.

"Great heavens!" cried Duke Gorman, falling back while he stared at the tall figure at which he had fired. "Is the man bewitched? I missed him at three paces!"

This was quite enough to surprise all who had seen the shot, for a deadlier marksman than the little man did not exist in Moonstone and when the form of the Mormon fired at at such close range was seen in the same spot, there was consternation on the faces of all.

"Fool! you can't hit a door," said the man from Utah with a laugh, as he advanced again looking down upon Duke Gorman upon whose shoulder one of his big hands fell like a trip-hammer. "Your master should have intrusted this mission to one who knows how to use a revolver, not to a swaggerer."

There was a suppressed laugh at Duke Gorman's expense and while he felt himself clutched by the tall man he wondered what could have diverted the course of the leaden sphere.

"The door is yonder. Go back and tell your master that you can't shoot," continued the Mormon.

"Not until I have killed you!"

Thrown toward the door of the den with the last words that fell from the Mormon's lips, Duke turned with a sound which was half-curse, half-yell.

He stood in the center of the aisle, still clutching his six-shooter, and all at once he lunged forward and thrusting the weapon into the Mormon's face, fired point-blank at the living target.

This time there was a sudden recoil, accompanied by a cry from the man who saw it all, but when the figure of the Mormon straightened a few feet from Duke, and that person saw on the bronzed face, so smoothly shaven, the same impish smile he had seen there a moment before the shot, he staggered toward the door, with every nerve unstrung, and the revolver nearly dropping from his hand.

"The devil and he are in partnership," he was heard to say. "I don't shoot at him any more."

"Go and tell your master that I know everything."

"I believe it," said Duke, halting near the door and looking back at the bullet-proof Mormon. "I won't interfere again with your intentions, but you can have the whole camp to yourself, and if you want to run things here, why, run them, but without my help."

He crossed the step and went out into the night, those who had watched him seeing on his face the sign of fear, and wondering where he would stop. The Mormon did not move, but was looking at Duke's vanishing form with a great deal of curiosity.

"In league with Satan, that's it!" gasped the discomfited man who hurried across the Square and in the direction of Murad's house. "The next time I undertake to insult a man of that sort they will know it, by Jupiter, they will."

He said no more, but put up his revolver and kept on until he stood in front of Murad's house. He looked up at the lighted window and hesitated. What, go in and tell Murad that he had failed to carry out the plan—that he, the best shot in Moonstone, had insulted the Mormon, had fired twice at him at short range and had seen him standing apparently unscathed where he had stood during the one-sided duel? It was asking a little too much, and after another glance at the windows Duke turned to one side and went on.

Meantime the Mormon had walked from the den with the mystified smile still at his lips. The men left behind were nearly as much non-plused as Duke Gorman had been and when they saw the tall man vanish they wondered what had turned aside the bullets of the little sport.

Mormon Sol did not stop to explain, but hastened away and in a few seconds turned into Buzzard Ben's shanty where he found the owner at a table discussing a cold meal which he had just taken from the larder.

"They played one part of the game awhile ago," said Mormon Sol to Ben. "He sent his lieutenant to the den and I heard his trigger twice!"

Fuzzard Ben looked into the speaker's face, but said nothing.

"He sent Duke Gorman, and he shot twice at me with not ten feet between us."

"Little Duke, the man with the swift fingers?" exclaimed Buzzard Ben, dropping the hunk of meat he was lifting to his mouth. "You don't pretend to say that he missed you?"

"Do I look like a human sieve?" asked the Mormon with a laugh. "Do I resemble a man who has been bored by a bullet or two?"

"You don't, Mormon Sol, but you have just said that Duke Gorman shot twice at you and missed."

"I didn't say that he missed," said the Mormon, leaning toward Ben, who still eyed him with surprise. "I don't say that now. I know that he got the drop twice, and shot to kill, because he was sent to me for that purpose; but, as yet, I am still in the land of the living, and the chances are that I will continue to inhabit it for some time to come."

He came closer to Buzzard Ben, and lowered his voice.

"What did I tell you the other day?" he went on. "Our cause is to be battled for. If we want to possess the New Ophir, we will have to hold our own against Murad and his minions, and you see that we will have them to fight—"

"All of them?" asked the man at the table.

"Every one, perhaps."

"I don't like that very much."

The eyes of the Mormon seemed to twinkle.

"You can withdraw from the fight if you

want to, but, mind, if you do there will be but the one share to the New Ophir."

"Take it, keep it, if you can!" cried Buzzard Ben.

"Then, you withdraw from the compact?"

Buzzard Ben seemed to hesitate. He looked first at the Mormon and then seemed to reflect.

"A man who has been shot at twice and missed by such a man as Duke Gorman isn't an ordinary mortal," he thought. "I believe he will come out of this game right end foremost and that if I stick to him awhile longer I may come out with him and get half of that wonderful bonanza. I'll try it once more."

"You are out of this game," said the Mormon at this juncture. "I dismiss you."

"But I have concluded—"

"I don't want pardons of your kind," broke in Mormon Sol. "I want men who don't swerve at all. I will find another pard if I want one."

Buzzard Ben was on his feet and the next moment would have seized the Mormon's arm if the door had not closed between him and the man from Utah.

Mormon Sol was gone and when Buzzard Ben returned to his meal he could not eat for thinking of what had just occurred.

"A man's a fool at least once in his life and this is my time," he said. "But I know the secret of the mine and that is something. I know where lies the new road to Ophir."

CHAPTER XIX.

CAIN AND ABEL.

THERE was a man who saw the last part of the scene at Brushwood's from the street in the immediate vicinity and he saw also the little figure of Duke Gorman come out and move away. This person stood near the den and noticed that the little man was excited and that he was talking to himself while he shook his head over something that puzzled him beyond explanation.

Presently the figure of Mormon Sol followed Duke and was seen by this same man, who was Silver Steve the Branded Athlete.

The handsome sport watched the Mormon with a good deal of curiosity, and when he moved toward Buzzard Ben's shanty, he followed him, but at a respectful distance and saw the door of the cabin close behind him.

Silver Steve did not play spy as he might have done, but halted some distance from the shanty and waited quietly for the Mormon's reappearance.

When Mormon Sol came out he was followed as before and all at once the hand of Steve fell upon the saint's shoulder causing him to turn as if a serpent had hissed at his side.

In the moonlight the two men stood face to face. They were very nearly of the same height and their build was about the same.

"Will you come with me, Mormon Sol?" said the Branded Athlete.

There was a momentary hesitation on the Mormon's part as he seemed to lean forward and look into the eyes that confronted him.

"What do you mean? You don't want to see me?" he said.

"I want to see you. If I did not, I wouldn't ask you to follow me. I have business of importance with you, Mormon Sol."

"Transact it here."

"Not here," was the quick reply. "My shanty is near, and there we will be secure. You had a scene at Brushwood's, and the wonder is that you got away with your life."

The Mormon laughed. He did not relish the thought of holding a talk with the man who not very long before had given him so long to get out of camp, and he had defied Silver Steve by remaining where he was. Now he was invited to a conference with this same man, and they were to be alone during it.

"You won't follow me, eh?" said Steve. "Are you afraid with all your pretended coolness, Mormon Sol?"

Afraid! The words seemed to cut like a two-edged sword, and for a second the man who heard seemed on the eve of resenting it. But all at once he clutched the Sport's sleeve and cried:

"Lead anywhere you please! You will find me at your heel. I am ready to listen to anything."

"This way, then," and Silver Steve turned about and walked toward his own cabin.

Holding open the door, he saw the Mormon cross the step, and a moment later he had followed him.

They were in a small chamber in keeping with the few needs of its owner, and Silver Steve waved his guest to a stool which the Mormon declined, but folded his arms instead and remained standing in the center of the room.

"What happened down at Brushwood's?" asked Steve.

"I was shot at twice; but that is not why you summoned me to this place, is it?"

"No. So you were shot at? But you don't seem to have stopped any bullets?"

The lip of the Mormon curled with triumph, and his eyes got the victorious gleam of the eagle's.

"Never mind what stopped the bullet of the little hot-head," he exclaimed. "I am here for a purpose. Enlighten me."

Silver Steve was silent for a moment.

"You have found Thirza, the Sixth," he said, at last.

"I have found the runaway," smiled Mormon Sol. "Do you want her, Silver Steve?"

There was grim humor in the voice, but the Branded Sport laughed as he replied:

"I don't want the wife of a Mormon. You have found her, but you don't seem to care whether she leaves you again or not."

"I have left the bars down as you have seen, no doubt. I don't stand between her and the mountains any more. Thirza can go if she likes. I wouldn't spend an hour looking after her again."

"She is beginning to appreciate this. She will soon know that she is free to go wherever she likes. But this is not it, Mormon Sol. The other one is not to fall into the net as easily as Thirza says the did."

There was a quick start, and the face of the man from Utah suddenly changed color as Steve saw.

"You can't play this new game and by it win another fly for the web with the same ease that gained you the victim already yours."

"What do you mean?"

"Shall I be plainer still?" and the face of Silver Steve came closer to the Mormon's. "You can't win the hand of Amber and wreck her life because you hold a secret which promises to loosen the hold certain people have on the girl."

"Are you her champion?" and Mormon Sol seemed to send the words through welded lips.

"Are you the girl's champion, I say?"

"I am Amber's friend."

Mormon Sol drew back, and, for a moment, looked at Silver Steve with the rage of a baffled tiger. Very few feet separated them, and the handsome sport kept his position and looked the man who had spoken last squarely in the eye.

"You may have a hold on the woman who calls Amber her child; you may hold in your hand the life-secret of the man who, in turn, exerts a powerful influence over the woman; but you can't hypnotize Amber by dark or by day and pull her into your clutches."

"Because you stand between, eh? Is that it, Silver Steve?"

"I am the girl's friend," repeated the Branded Sport. "I am here to stand by the waif of Moonstone, and the hand that attempts to wreck her life wins the eternal hatred of Silver Steve."

It seemed to the speaker that the man who heard him fell back, and with those strange eyes of his fastened upon him, glared at him with the fury of a demon.

"Is that all?" said Mormon Sol. "Did you call me to your shanty for this?"

Before Silver Steve could reply, the Mormon had reached the door and was looking back over his broad shoulder at him.

"Halt!" cried the Branded Athlete. "I will make no mistake, no matter what Duke Gorman did awhile ago. I will send through your head the bullet of justice, unless you stand where you are and hear me through."

"Go on, then."

Mormon Sol's hand fell back from the latch and he waited for Silver Steve to proceed.

"Who wrote the letter you guarded so well when you were among the Saints?" asked the Sport.

"What letter?"

"Don't tell me that so important an event has slipped your memory."

"There are letters and letters," remarked the Mormon, with a grin beneath which, however, lurked a good deal of latent seriousness.

"The letter which fell into the hand of Wun Look, the pagan," Silver Steve hastened to say.

"It is the one that took you more than once to the Chinaman's shanty and you found it not. You know that yellow man? You know the man who has lost his eyes—that he was one of the avenging angels of the Dead Buttes. Don't stand there and deny that, Mormon Sol. Shall I call the Celestial now?"

"Let the pagan remain where he is," was the answer. "I don't care to see him here with his bandaged eye. We will go back to the letter."

Silver Steve waited for the Mormon to go on.

"The writer of that letter shall have his identity held sacred by me. I know that another man in Moonstone would like to know something about him. By the way, Silver Steve, has your ferret pard struck the trail yet?"

There was derision in the Mormon's tones which did not escape the Branded Athlete.

"Your friend, Diamond Don, who is on the trail, is working up a deep game, but he may reach the end of the track to find—nothing!"

"Diamond Don can look out for himself. He is a man of keen parts, and you know that he has cause to hunt for the clew of the old crime."

"The old crime, eh?"

"Yes."

Once more the Mormon glanced toward the door, and as Silver Steve did not seem to interfere, he went toward it and stood near the portal.

"I am Mormon Sol against all plots," he said. "You can summon me to your shanty and tell

me about a letter, but you can't break the force of my hold on the man I have in that hand."

He held out his hand while his eyes glowed with a strange light and his voice sunk almost to a singular whisper.

"You threatened Lady Jezebel and said to Murad, the Mysterious, 'Stand off,' and you were obeyed," said the Branded Sport. "You came to Moonstone not for the express purpose of looking after a lost wife but for another purpose."

"Do you think so, Silver Steve?"

"You have found Thirza, the Sixth, but you have spread a net for another victim. In other words, you have settled on Amber for that victim."

"She's pretty, eh?" grinned Mormon, not at all disconcerted by the handsome Sport.

"She is too pure to be mentioned by lips like yours."

The tall figure of the Mormon straightened and a laugh rippled over his lips.

"That's good. You don't deem me a Saint in more than name? You don't entertain a very high opinion of Mormon Sol?"

"I don't, but let that part of it pass. You touch Amber at your peril; you interfere with her happiness at the risk of your life, Mormon Sol."

"A challenge, ha?" cried the man from Mormondom. "You threaten me, do you? All right. Another man against me—that's all."

The tones in which these words were uttered went to the heart of Silver Steve.

He closed by a quick bound the gap between him and the Mormon, and before the Saint could resist he was clutched by the hands of Silver Steve and held against the door.

"You can make it war eternal between us!" cried the Branded Sport. "It all lies with you, Mormon Sol. I have warned you and if you touch Amber or weave a net for her, as you have done for others, the charm that turned aside the bullets of Duke Gorman, shall prove powerless to ward off mine."

The man from Utah wrenched himself from the hands of the long-haired sport and in so doing, his shirt opened and the Branded Athlete saw something that threw him back as if hurled by main force from the Mormon serpent.

"Great God! go and put a thousand miles between us!" cried Silver Steve, his face white and horror-struck. "Don't show me that accursed mark again."

The hand of the Mormon had closed the opening but he knew what the Sport had seen. "A thousand miles, did I say?" continued Silver Steve, as Mormon Sol seemed to hesitate. "Put a sea between us, for if you remain I will shoot you down in the streets of Moonstone, for you know that Heaven would justify the deed."

The Mormon stared, but did not move.

"What did you see?" he said. "You look like a man who had seen a ghost."

"I have seen enough."

"Ho! the mark on my breast?—the sign I carry wherever I go, eh?"

"That accursed brand which tells so much."

"That's nothing," said the Mormon. "I have carried it for years, and you are the first person who turned pale at it."

"Did I turn pale? Well, who has a better right to lose color at sight of it? But, go!"

The Mormon laughed again, and appeared to lean toward Silver Steve instead of quitting the house.

"I have one, too—I have a mark on my bosom. I am branded with a curse, and—"

"Branded, are you?" broke in the Mormon.

"Let me see your brand? Come, Silver Steve, open your shirt and show me that mark you carry, perhaps over your heart."

"I will not, but I know that we must forever remain apart. If you persist in remaining near me, the hands you used to worship may be lifted against you. You have heard the story of Cain and Abel—"

"Ha! ha! I've heard that," interrupted the man from Utah. "Is that why we must place a sea between one another?"

"Go, go! Quit this house and camp right off. By heavens, you must."

The door was pulled open by Silver Steve, and the next moment he seized Mormon Sol and pushed him across the threshold.

"Reptile, go!" he hissed. "I can't bear the sight of you, though I should respect you for the sake of one of the best women that ever lived. Darken this door again and there is no telling what this band will do. You have a memory, and that is why you should put between us a thousand miles or more."

The look in Mormon Sol's eyes was one of blank astonishment. He stood for a moment beyond the door, and then with a gasping cry which seemed but half-human, he turned and fled.

Once he looked back, but the door was shut, and clasping his hands, he exclaimed:

"Who would have thought it? When did the dead man come to life? In the name of heaven, what mad fortune threw that man across my path?"

There was no reply, and passing down the street he was nearly back to Buzzard Ben's

shanty when he was stopped by the click of a revolver, and heard the name he had heard before.

"Don't you see, this time your hour has come. I am going to kill you where you stand."

He looked ahead—looked with his hand on his own six-shooter—and saw erect in the starlight the well known figure of Murad, the Mysterious.

CHAPTER XX.

MOGUL AND BRANDED SPORT.

MORMON SOL recalled the meeting with Murad in the depth of the mine underneath the house of the Mysterious and here he stood again before the revolver of the strange man.

They were alone in the street, at least the Mormon saw no one but Murad, and the tones he had just heard told that there was no escape unless the bullets met with the same fate as those fired at him by Duke Gorman in the saloon.

"We have met again and for the last time," continued Murad. "I am determined to put an end to this game of yours for I know what you are playing for."

"Then you know enough to press the trigger," said the Mormon, who seemed cool and collected.

The form of Murad seemed to move a step toward Mormon Sol and the next instant the six-shooter spoke and a puff of white smoke rose between the two men.

The figure of the man from Utah was seen to recoil a step, but he immediately recovered and stretched out his hand.

"You should take lessons in shooting, Murad," he said. "You will need the trigger some other day. Good night."

Murad stood like a man roused suddenly from a startling dream. He saw walking from him with the coolness of a practiced desperado the man at whose heart he had fired. Mormon Sol was still within range and his back presented a target which could not be missed at that distance, but the hand of Murad was not lifted again.

"The deuce take him!" he said between his teeth. "Some other time, as he says."

He watched the figure of the man from Mormondom until it vanished beyond the door of Buzzard Ben's shanty, and then turned back himself.

It could not be that he had missed the man, that his revolver had deceived him, yet the living target had walked off after the shot, apparently unharmed.

"When Lady Jezebel returns we will put our heads together and play a hand that will surprise this man," he muttered. "We will show all of them that the tiger brought to bay can fight and slay his hunters. We will fight to the last, and the hands put forward to play the last cards and rake in the stakes, may fall back, dead hands forever."

Murad, the Mysterious, passed into his house and went to the little room where he sometimes held conference with the men under his thumb.

All at once he arose and opened the trap which led down to the heart of the mine where he and Parker had their battle with the mountain lions.

"I would like to see how the animals got into the mine," he said. "There must be an outlet somewhere, for they never got into it through this house."

In a little while he was on the spot where still lay the body of Parker, and holding the torch over it, he looked down into the face of his friend and upon the stiffening body of the lion. A little further on he discovered the body of the lioness he had vanquished, and the flitting form of a cub showed up for a moment and left him before he could stop it with his revolver. Murad went on and on, or until he found the nest of the mountain lions, and saw that for some time the animals had inhabited the old mine.

"Here it is," he cried. "Here is the trail which leads to the outside world. I thought there must be some outlet, else these animals had not been here to kill Parker and give me a tussle for life."

Murad felt on his cheeks the air of the mountain as he looked down the narrow corridor through which the animals had entered the mine. For the first time he knew that the secret of the New Ophir had not been his alone. Of course he knew that it had been discovered by Mormon Sol and Buzzard Ben, but he was not afraid of those two men. He seemed to dread the presence of mountain lions in his mine, and placing his torch in a crevice in the rocks, he began to make fast the entrance against any more invasions of that nature.

Murad was engaged in this business when he was startled by a noise, and turning suddenly, he drew back at sight of the object that came forward hugging the wall and glaring at him with all the malignity of a demon.

"Another lion?" cried Murad, stopping work and falling back against the largest rock while he drew a revolver and looked with distended eyes. "In heaven's name, is this mine a breeding place for these beasts?"

The lion came on, his eyes aflame and his brown neck craned forward as he took in the sight before him—a man and a torch, and the man standing in the path with a six-shooter clutched in his hand.

Murad, the Mogul, watched the sneaking

animal and saw by the eyes that shone in the light how angry it already was, then, as the lion crouched till its belly touched the ground, he aimed at the forehead and fired.

"We'll see if you are bullet proof like Mormon Sol," he exclaimed. "We will see if you can't be dropped by a bullet well aimed and deadly."

At sound of the six-shooter the huge body of the animal leaped into the air and fell back with a cry almost human. As it rolled over Murad saw the result of his shot and before he reached the lion it was dead and quivered but little in the light of his torch.

"A good shot," said a voice at sound of which the Mogul looked up.

He saw standing against the wall with his arms folded a man who looked at first like a tall apparition; but a second look told him that he confronted flesh and blood, and active flesh and blood at that.

"The deuce! How did you come down into this place?" cried the Mogul. "And what do you want here in the heart of Murad's mine?"

The person addressed came forward and when he had gained a point almost within arm's reach of the Mogul he stopped and said:

"Your mine, Murad? When did you become owner of the Buried Bonanza?"

The Mogul of Moonstone said nothing, but looked at the man whose coolness was so striking that he had to wonder at his coming to the place.

"You are in league with the rest of them, Silver Steve. I won't ask you how you came down here, but you found the door in the floor, or you know the pathway of the lions—"

"I came by the latter route, if you want to know. The secret of the lions, accidentally discovered by me, some time ago, has been utilized before to-night, though there were some risks in coming thither when the mine was tenanted by the animals. That was the last one, wasn't it?" and the Branded Sport cast his eyes upon the dead lion lying at the Mogul's feet.

"I don't know," said Murad.

"There are two more down yonder, but they are dead," continued Silver Steve. "I found Parker, the guardian of the other mine, lying near one of the animals. Did they kill him?"

"Parker died by teeth and claw, though he fought like a hero for his life. I killed the second lion myself."

A smile seemed to flit across the face of the Silver Sport, and for a moment he looked at Murad without continuing.

"You did not look for me here?" he said at last. "When I spoke, you started and leaned forward as if you expected to peer into other eyes than mine."

"I did. I won't keep that back. I did not look for you in this bonanza."

"For Mormon Sol, eh, Murad?"

"How do you know that? Yes, I was looking for Mormon Sol's face when I leaned toward you awhile ago. Always the man from Utah!"

Murad said this with a laugh, and the following moment he had come forward and stood so close to Silver Steve that the torch he held almost singed the Sport's mustache.

"You came hither for a purpose," he said. "You knew I was here."

"I thought so at any rate."

"Then, you wanted to see me."

"Yes, I wanted to see you, Murad."

"Well, here I am."

The Mogul of Moonstone drew back, and seemed to wait on the man who was looking at him from the opposite wall. He saw that the face of Silver Steve was seamed with anxiety, and when he spoke his voice seemed to have undergone a change.

"Why don't you turn on this Mormon serpent?" asked the Branded Sport.

"The time for that has not come."

"Are you waiting for Lady Jezebel to come back?"

Murad started.

"For Lady Jezebel?" he repeated strangely.

"For the woman who went off on horseback some hours ago. Don't you intend to try to break the web of the Mormon spider until she returns? He might play his game before that—"

"What game?"

Silver Steve looked into the face before him and for a little while seemed to study it intently.

"Captain Murad, they call you the Mysterious. It is because a part of your life has been kept from the men of Moonstone. You know the past life of nearly every man who is in your employ; you know the secrets of the lives with which you have come in contact ever since you came to Moonstone. You knew that this man, Mormon Sol, lived in Utah; but you did not expect to see him cross your path at this stage of the game. You should have known that he has watched the young girl growing up under Lady Jezebel's eye, that he would some day come to the nest to despoil it with the hands which you fear. You should have known that this same man, Mormon Sol, has a past which is darker than your own."

"Darker than my own?" broke in the Mogul.

"Darker even than that," said Silver Steve, coolly, knowing the temperament of the man with whom he was dealing. "I don't intend to

stand here and read history. I am here on another mission. I say that you might have guessed, if not known, that the beauty of the girl named Amber would have attracted the Mormon from the webs of Mormondom. He bided his time, that man did, and when it came he was on deck with the cards in his hand. A runaway wife furnished the pretext, he knew the trails across the mountains and when you feel secure he turns up and throws the first trump upon the boards."

There was no answer, the Mogul watching Silver Steve with all eyes and hanging on every word like a prisoner listening to the sentence of the judge.

"You don't intend to give Amber up to this man?" the Sport went on.

"No. Wait till Lady Jezebel returns."

"Why wait till then?" said Silver Steve. "Don't you know that this man has already turned the bullets of Duke Gorman?"

"And mine, too," smiled Murad. "It is simply a steel doublet, nothing magical."

"It is the wonder of the camp. It has already set the men to thinking and Mormon Sol is set down as being in league with his Satanic Majesty."

The lips of Murad, the Mysterious, curled derisively a little and he laughed.

"All will be made clear when Lady Jezebel returns," he exclaimed. "There is a power which the steel doublet of the Mormon cannot resist. But why do you take such interest in Amber? You are Diamond Don's pard; you are in league with the man with the jeweled rings—the sport of the tables who always wins, as if he had a cinch on fortune's purse."

"Amber is a girl who should not be bartered to this man because he holds a secret which affects the lives of those who watch over her."

"What is that?" the figure of Murad came closer still and his face was white. "Do you mean that we have bartered Amber to Mormon Sol on account of a secret he may hold?"

"I mean nothing else. You have done this. You and Lady Jezebel have given Amber over to this man from Mormondom because he claims to possess the secret of your lives. You are Murad, the Mysterious; but you are also Murad, the Criminal!"

The man who had been looking so steadily at Silver Steve went back, gazing at him still, but with a face suddenly changed, and terror-stricken in color and contour.

"Hear me out, now that you have forced me to this," continued the Branded Athlete. "The game of Mormon Sol shall be broken and the man himself driven from Moonstone this very night. You, Murad, the Mogul, shall issue the decree of banishment, and I will post it with my own hands. I know the power vested in you by common consent. You shall not wait until Lady Jezebel returns, but it must be done now. There are writing materials above us. Shall we go up?"

"Yes. I will do it. I will write the decree, and the Mormon spider goes back to the web this night, or his body will dangle from the big tree on the Plaza at daybreak."

Silver Steve saw that the man was in earnest, and when Murad took up the torch and went down the corridor he followed at his heels, and they soon came out in the parlor, where the Mogul was once more at home.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE DEFIED DECREE.

WITH no effort at concealment a man walked across the Plaza and stopped in front of the huge tree that overshadowed part of it. He took from his bosom a paper which he proceeded to nail to the tree, after which, with a parting look at his work, he drew off and went back over the same ground.

He was seen by several men from the doors of as many shanties and when he had vanished these persons came forward to see what had been left on the tree.

"It's a decree!" exclaimed one of the three. "It is regularly issued by Murad, but that man was Silver Steve."

Yes, it was a decree and the men read it in the light of a match and then looked at one another.

It was a decree banishing Mormon Sol from camp and warning him to quit Moonstone within three hours on pain of death. There were few words in the decree, which was written in bold characters and read as follows:

"A DECREE.

"The man who is known as Mormon Sol and who at this time is within the borders of Moonstone City, is hereby ordered to quit the camp within three hours from the posting of this decree. There will be no explanation as I am permitted by the camp to issue decrees against those who are regarded as our enemies, and by authority of this permission, I, Murad, warn Mormon Sol to take his body and belongings from Moonstone at once. A failure to obey the decrees of this camp means death to the disobedient. A word to the wise ought to be sufficient."

"MURAD."

"I wonder if the Mormon knows it?" asked one of the three at the tree.

"He will know it in a minute."

"Are you going to tell him?"

"No, but yonder is his new pard, Buzzard Ben."

The reddish-bearded sport was seen coming forward and the men at the tree hailed him and let him read the decree, which he did with a singular smile at the corners of his mouth.

"He won't go, gentlemen," said Ben looking up after the perusal of the document.

"But he'll have to."

"You don't know this man."

"I guess no one knows him but Murad, and that's why the decree was posted."

"Who posted it?"

"Silver Steve."

The eyes of Buzzard Ben opened prodigiously and he gave a long, low whistle.

"The Branded Pard, eh?" he said. "The man who is in league with Diamond Don and who is also the friend of Wun Look, the sightless pagan? When did he get so thick with Murad that he is given the decrees to post?"

The next moment the figure of Buzzard Ben was marching across the Plaza and those who watched him saw him turn aside and suddenly open the door of a small shanty in the shadows of a larger one.

"They've posted you," said the red-beard. "I thought I would let you know, notwithstanding how you served me awhile ago. They've posted the decree—the first one the camp's had for a long while—and you are notified to get out of Moonstone within three hours."

There was a slight start by the man whom Ben had surprised in the act of writing, his form bent over a rough table and his dark face and darker eyes close to a piece of yellowish paper. In another moment Mormon Sol stood erect and looked at Buzzard Ben.

"So, they've posted me, have they?" he said. "Whose work is it?"

"All decrees in Moonstone to be good must be signed by Murad."

"And this one?"

"This one is genuine, Captain Sol. It has been signed by Murad, the Mysterious, and is on the tree in the Square."

For a moment the giant figure of the man from Utah stood in the light and not a word passed his lips. He seemed to be looking beyond Buzzard Ben as if his thoughts were elsewhere, but all at once he went to the door and looked out.

"Posted!"

He spoke the word with a tinge of derision in his tone.

"The decree is probably signed and has been posted by your master Murad. It makes no difference who posted it—"

"That was done by Silver Steve and that's what puzzles me," put in the red-beard. "You see Steve is Diamond Don's pard and has been supposed to be playing a hand of some kind against Murad. He posted the paper that exiles you and—"

"Silver Steve, you say? Posted the decree?"

"He did it open and above-board. He was seen to post it and when he had done so he walked back without any secrecy. It is rather strange. We all think so."

If Mormon Sol thought the same way he did not say so, and for some time after Buzzard Ben's story, said nothing.

"Buzzard," he said, leaning slightly forward, "is the power of Murad absolute here?"

"Pretty nearly so."

"What gave him such a hold on the men of Moonstone?"

"There's where you have me," smiled the red-beard. "I can't answer that question. He has the whole camp in his grip and you may know that he has when I tell you he is court, judge and jury when a decree of banishment is to be issued ag'in' any one."

"They will carry it out, will they, and ask no questions why?"

"That's what they will do. Queer, isn't it?"

"No, nothing is strange nowadays," said Mormon Sol. "The hold some men obtain over others is startling, but never incredible. Man is a slave or a master. He must be one or the other. Some men are born slaves, others born masters."

"Like Murad?"

"I didn't say that," said the other.

"I know you didn't, but it looks that way here in Moonstone."

The eyes of Mormon Sol wandered to the writing on which the last ink marks were hardly dry, and blotting it suddenly, he folded it and thrust it into his bosom.

"What if I refuse to go, Buzzard Ben?" he asked.

"That lies with you."

"Would you go?"

"I haven't been banished."

"Of course not. I wasn't trying to draw a paralled case in your mind. If you were in my place, would you go? That's what I meant."

Buzzard Ben thought a moment and his face was a picture of seriousness.

"If I war into it and the decree war posted against me, I guess I'd emigrate," he said at last.

"You would go and leave them forever; you would give them a bloodless victory without lifting a finger in behalf of your cause?"

"The odds ar' against you."

"More than ten to one, eh?"

"More than fifty to one," said Buzzard Ben.

Mormon Sol went back to the table and sat down. The red-beard remained at the door watching the play of light and shadow on his face, and trying to forecast the near future. He saw the Mormon dip the pen into the ink and bend over a fresh bit of paper which he took from the table drawer.

In another moment Mormon Sol was writing, making the characters unusually large, and while he wrote nothing was heard in the room but the labored breathing of the solitary man who watched him.

"I am going to give the old tree another burden," said the man from Utah, looking and catching Buzzard Ben's eyes so suddenly that he started. "I am going to give the men of Moonstone a little excitement."

"You mean you ain't going?"

"You shall see," was the reply and the next moment the Mormon rose, holding what he had written in his hand.

"A man must fight when he is forced to do so," he went on. "He must sometimes defend himself and that is just what Mormon Sol proposes to do."

Buzzard Ben glanced at the paper in the Mormon's hand.

"Ar' you goin' to post that alongside the decree?"

"That is just what I am going to do," smiled the man from Mormondom.

He walked from the cabin with steady step and eagle eye. Buzzard Ben, who backed from the door, watched his tall figure as it moved across the street and nearer the tree.

"That man has the coolness of Satan," he muttered. "He is bound to defy the camp and lose his life. That is the way he will lose the Buried Bonanza, and, as he said once, there will be but one share, and it won't be his, either."

The Mormon gained the tree and after looking at the document which Silver Steve had nailed to it, he posted what he had written beside it and turned back.

There was something very cool in the movements of the strange man from Mormondom. He came back regarded by Buzzard Ben, who kept out of his road and who saw him re-enter the little shanty, while he himself stole back to his own.

Presently there came down the street, with the motions of a person deprived of the power of seeing, a figure that had a familiar look. The face was no longer bandaged, but a green shade appeared where the bandage had been, for the man was Wun Look, the pagan, and he seemed to be feeling his way.

The Chinaman brought up in front of a door, at which he knocked, and after awhile he was admitted, and the beautiful girl who had opened to him, felt his hand in hers and saw the look of pain that seemed to distort his face.

"Wun Look has found Amber once more," said the Celestial. "He has something to say, and that is why he has crawled from his dark hut to meet her."

Amber led the Chinaman to a chair and watched him as he turned to where she stood waiting for him to go on.

"They have sold you to the Mormon—to the spider from Utah," said Wun Look, stretching out his hands in hopes of touching the figure in front of him.

"Who has done this, Wun Look?"

"Murad and Lady Jezebel."

A slight cry from Amber's lips told how intently she was listening to every word.

"But they can't deliver me even if they have gone so far," she said. "You forget, Wun Look, that it takes more than two to make a bargain and that they dare not carry out their compact, even saying that it has been made."

"The oath has been taken. The game played by the Mormon is deep and deadly. He holds the two in his hand, for he knows the secret of the past. You can do nothing unless you trust to your friends. Amber, the hand of Wun Look is with you, and the eyes which used to glow in his head have got into his fingers and he can see again."

"Is the man mad?" thought the young girl, as she leaned forward. "What does he mean by such talk? Eyes in his fingers? Impossible," and she took notice of the long yellow fingers of the man before her.

"You have friends," continued the blind Chinaman, rising and coming forward, guided, perhaps, by Amber's voice. "I still feel the softness of the terrible hand that robbed me of my last eye. Lady Jezebel has gone on a journey."

How did Wun Look know this?

"She won't be back before a day after tomorrow. She may never return, but Murad, the Mogul, is praying for her coming at this very moment."

"Did he send her off, Wun Look?"

"He sent her, Amber. The Mysterious Man of Moonstone sent her to the trail and the black horse is carrying a precious burden to-night. Lady Jezebel, the tigress of the mountains, has eyes as keen as a hawk; but she may not see the dangers that lurk along the way."

"But the selling of me to this man-monster,

Mormon Sol?" said the fair girl. "What proof have you, Wun Look?"

"I overheard the bargain. I can hear if I can't see. I know when and where to listen, and my ears are as sharp as those of a young fox. Lady Jezebel has gone off in hopes of breaking the spell—in hopes, Amber, of overturning the power of the Mormon, but she can't do that."

The Chinaman laughed and turned away from Amber for a moment.

For a little while the lissom form of Amber stood in Wun Look's way, then she slipped to another corner of the cabin, and turning suddenly upon the sightless Celestial, placed something in his hands. It was the hilt of a dagger, and as the yellow fingers of the little man wound themselves about it, he smiled and turned his face up toward Amber's.

"Wun Look knows what Amber means by this, but she must not do it," he said. "There is one way out of it. There is one way out of the snare."

"But one way?" cried Amber, clutching the Chinaman's sleeve. "Name it, Wun Look."

"You must become the wife of Silver Steve."

A strange cry parted the young girl's lips.

"Not yet! not yet!" she cried. "The time for that act has not yet come. We will fight them off awhile longer, Wun Look. It must be done."

CHAPTER XXII.

FOR THE LAST TIME.

SILVER STEVE, the Branded Athlete, stood in his own shanty, and seemed to be counting the moments as they flew over his head. It was after midnight, and he had posted the decree which he had exacted from Murad, the Mysterious, whom he encountered in the heart of the hidden Ophir.

His last meeting with Mormon Sol was still uppermost in his mind, and he had recalled it again and again.

Presently footsteps came near the house, and the Sport, going to the door, stood face to face with Wun Look.

"Don't you ever sleep?" said the Athlete, as he pulled the sightless man into the shanty.

"Not when the fate of a friend trembles in the balances," said the yellow man. "I have just come from Amber, the beautiful. I have told her of the plot—how she has been sold to the serpent from Utah, and how she can escape the snare of the Mormon fowler."

In the light of the little lamp burning with a sickly flame on the Athlete's table, stood the blind pagan, his grotesque figure falling in a singular shadow on the wall behind him. Silver Steve regarded him for a moment, and then asked him how Amber could escape.

"I told her that she could get out of the net by becoming the wife of Silver Steve."

"Heavens! you did not tell her this, Wun Look?" cried the Branded Sport.

"Why not?"

"Because—"

"She did not say that such an event could never occur, but she said not now."

The Sport looked down into the face upturned for his gaze, and for a second seemed to smile.

"She said not now, nothing more," continued the Chinaman. "I told her that, as your wife, the hands of the Mormon would never close upon her, and that she would then have a protector, and that the power of Lady Jezebel would amount to nothing when it came to sell her to the man who exercises such a hold over her and her husband, Murad."

Silver Steve was silent for a moment, but he took the Chinaman's hand and drew him forward.

"Let me tell you something. The decree, signed by Murad, has been posted, and is now on the tree."

"But there is another paper with it."

"Who told you?"

"I felt both of them. I felt them as I crossed the Plaza, and the other one must be the Mormon's defiance."

"It must be," echoed Silver Steve. "The man from Utah must have defied the Mogul and posted his defiance alongside the writ of banishment. Is this Saint mad?"

"He is mad enough when a face as fair as Amber's is in the game."

The Branded Athlete bade Wun Look remain in the shanty until he came back, then he went out and read the Mormon's defiance on the tree, brazenly placed alongside the other one. When he came back he was cool, and the Chinaman knew what the second paper meant.

"I thought so," said Wun Look. "That means war—war for Amber!"

Silver Steve seemed to think a moment.

"The three hours are passing rapidly," he said. "This man must go. He shall not remain and fall into the hands of Murad's men."

"But he says no."

"That is what he says by the document he has posted. I know he means it, but by the soul of a woman who is now a saint! he must not die like a dog in Moonstone."

If the Chinaman had had eyes they would have stared at Silver Steve laden with wonder; as it was, his face was turned toward the

Branded Athlete, and he leaned forward as if by some means he would read the true meaning of what had just been spoken.

Silver Steve went to one side of the shanty and remained a few minutes. When he came back he caught the Chinaman's hand and led him forward.

"Go back—back home," he said; "and don't bother Amber again about what you have already suggested."

"But, Silver Steve, it did not seem distasteful to Amber."

"Maybe not, but it was not the time or place for a suggestion of that sort."

The Athlete smiled and led the Celestial from the shanty. Down the street they went side by side, the hand of the tall, handsome Sport at Wun Look's wrist, and now and then his gaze would drop to the face which would forever know naught but the darkest night.

Silver Steve did not turn back until he had seen the pagan once more in his own house, and when he went away it was with a parting look which seemed to convey his thanks.

Straight toward the shanty occupied by Mormon Sol since breaking pardship with Buzzard Ben went the Branded Athlete.

He was cool and collected and his mission seemed one to require decision of nerve and force of character. He did not pause until he reached the shanty at the door of which he knocked, but received no answer.

"Not at home, eh?" said the Sport, drawing back. "Has he changed his mind and, at the last moment, given up the fight?"

He crossed the Plaza to the tree and saw together there the two documents, the decree and the defiance, then, having looked at both, he turned toward Brushwood's, and looked in for a full minute, but saw no one in whom he took more than a passing interest.

Silver Steve turned toward the Plaza again, when he saw a form advancing from toward Murad's house. In an instant he stopped and looked at it.

"Here yet?" he said, under his breath. "The man is tempting fate. He doesn't seem to realize the game as it stands, for he can't fight Murad and Moonstone, and I don't want to come out in behalf of a reptile who was once a man."

Mormon Sol's figure was the one which Silver Steve had caught sight of and he waited for the Saint to come up.

The broad-brimmed hat crushed down over the dark brows of the man from Utah, spoke his identity, and when he was within touching distance, the hand of the Branded Athlete gripped his sleeve and he started up to fall back with a cry.

"You persist, do you? You will perish with your boots on when life exists beyond the mountains?"

The Mormon's face seemed to light up with a defiant smile.

"I have posted my answer on yon tree," he said, and his hand covered the tree on the Plaza. "I have told the Mogul of Moonstone that I intend to have my own."

"You have found her. Thirza, the Sixth, waits you in yonder shanty."

"Thirza? I have done with her!" said Mormon Sol. "She can take unto herself wings whenever she likes and fly to the uttermost ends of the earth."

"But you must go."

Mormon Sol seemed to draw back and his face got a malignant expression.

"Come," continued Silver Steve. "Come with me. The last hour of grace is on the wane. You have just time enough to reach the confines of Moonstone."

Mormon Sol broke from the Athlete's grasp and straightened in the moonlight.

"Just time enough to play coward, eh?" he cried.

"You shall go! The life you have, desperate as it has been, is something to me, as you must know down in the depths of your heart. You must not die with your boots on before the minions of Murad, the Mysterious. This is the way out of Moonstone."

But the man standing statue-like before the Branded Athlete did not stir. His breast heaved, and the hat thrown back on his broad, dark temples, showed his full face and the gleams that lit up his deep-set eyes.

"You have played a cool, deep game," continued Silver Steve. "You have played it for fair stakes, but you cannot win."

"I will win!"

"You shall not!"

"What is the game to you?" cried Mormon Sol. "You can have Thirza, the cast-off. She is yours from this moment if you say so."

"I don't want her," was the quick answer. "I don't want the woman you have thrown aside after wrecking her young life by making her a Mormon's wife. My hand is between you and the rest of the play. Not only this, but you must not perish at the hands of Murad and his men, because I am in Moonstone."

Mormon Sol stepped back, and with uplifted hand pointed toward the Mogul's house.

"There lives the man your pard wants," he said. "There dwells the man who has lured

Diamond Don to the trail he has been following. I need not keep the secret any longer. There he lives, I say. Go back and tell Diamond Don, the detective, that he need look no further for the man who left the woman in the mine beneath the Ten Shanties years ago. But this is not the real secret I have been keeping for him. I don't wonder that I am a marked man. It is not strange that I am the banished man of Moonstone, but the hand that seeks to break my power by posting me and turning against me during the absence of the woman who would come between him and his schemes, shall fall powerless at its owner's side. I go from Moonstone? I shall yet be Mogul here!"

The mien of the Mormon was something to look at, and Silver Steve, who heard every word as it fell like hissing water from his tongue, could not but wonder what spirit animated this man-devil with the smooth face and deep-set eyes.

"If the living do not frighten you, for the sake of the dead, go!" cried the Branded Athlete.

"I know no dead," was the answer. "And the living have no terrors for Mormon Sol."

Silver Steve turned and walked away.

His lips were welded beneath the mustache that drooped over them.

"For the last time, I warn you!" he exclaimed, halting and looking at the man who was watching him from where they had parted. "I will throw the memories of the past to the winds if you persist in your madness. I will forget the ties that should bind us. I will even turn against you and take part in the crusade against the guilty. It is the last warning."

The Mormon laughed and sent after Silver Steve a look that seemed to burn like a rocket on its course.

"Fool, you don't know what has happened since we were boys," he exclaimed.

Silver Steve stopped.

"You can't fight Murad and all of us," he said. "You can't play out this game successfully."

"Wait and see."

"The vultures will feast on all that is human of Mormon Sol."

"Wait and see!"

Another look and the Branded Sport turned again and passed on. He neither looked back to see what became of the man from Utah, nor listened to the defiance that fell from his lips.

"The man is going to fight," he said to Diamond Don, into whose presence he came five minutes later. "I have done all I will do to save him."

"To save whom?"

"Mormon Sol?"

Diamond Don started and gave the Branded Athlete a singular look.

"What, you save this reptile without a soul?" he exclaimed. "You go out of your way, and even risk your life to rescue this man of crimes and cunning?"

There was no reply, but the lips of Silver Steve seemed to meet, and his hands shut and quivered. Some strong emotion had taken possession of him, and he turned from the ferret-sport, who watched him as if he were a living puzzle.

"The time is up," said Diamond Don. "The three hours allotted in the decree of banishment have expired, and Murad will look after the execution of the threat."

The words seemed to rouse Silver Steve.

"Let him die!" continued Diamond Don. "He is not the man we want. He is not the person who has lured me from the trails of the East."

"He must not perish."

"But think of what he has been. Think what he is after now. This man-spider of Utah has woven a web for the fairest, purest creature in these gold hills, and yet you—"

The look in Silver Steve's eyes broke the detective's sentence.

In another moment the Athlete had sprung forward and clutched Diamond Don's wrist. The ferret saw the white face of the sport come down toward his, and his lips almost touched his ears.

"Great God! it can not be!" cried Diamond Don, falling back with a start. "What you have told me must be the ogre of a dream. That man—"

"Hush!" interrupted Silver Steve. "Would to Heaven it was the basest of lies."

CHAPTER XXIII.

FORCING A TRUCE.

MURAD, the Mysterious, had looked more than once at his watch during the last three hours. The time allotted to Mormon Sol in the decree posted on the tree in the Square had about expired, and he was ready to carry out the threat it contained.

The Man of Mystery was prepared to meet the Mormon, and fight with him for the mastery, for he realized that they would have to come together some time, and he seemed eager to settle everything now rather than wait till Lady Jezebel's return.

When he noted the time, and saw that it was about to expire, he jerked a cord that dangled from the ceiling of the room, and waited for a response. This was not long delayed, and the man who came in was not Duke Gorman whose failure to carry out Murad's orders had caused him to turn his back on the camp, and at that moment he was far away threading the mazes of the mountain trail with a registered vow never again to set foot within the borders of Moonstone while the present state of affairs existed there.

"You read the decree?" said Murad to the tall, giant-like man who stood before him.

"It's been read by all the camp, so has the answer alongside of it."

"The answer?" said the Mysterious, with a slight start.

"Mormon's Sol's defiance."

"He has defied us, then?"

"He says plainly that he won't be driven off—that he will stay and fight it out."

"The fool!" smiled Murad. "This man may be brave, but on this occasion bravery is death."

The Mogul was silent for a moment, when he arose, and crossing the chamber, came back with a packet in his hand.

Placing it on the table, while he looked up at the man quietly waiting for orders, he went on:

"There must be no foolishness with this question of exile. Mormon Sol must go."

"I guess the whole camp's willing," said the man.

"Where is he?"

"Probably at home, in the new shanty; that was a light there as I came along."

"Go and tell the men. Say to them that the decree is to be carried out at once."

"Must we close in on him now?"

"At once!"

In another minute the Mogul was left alone, and for some time he stood by the table, his face showing the workings of his mind, and that he had resolved to fight it out for the last time with this cool man who held a secret, which, on a previous occasion, had awed him in Lady Jezebel's presence.

Meantime in the new cabin stood the man against whom the plot was working.

Mormon Sol's interview with Silver Steve was showing its effects, although the face of the man from Utah was hard to read. He stood in the middle of the room, with his hands shut hard and his lips glued together like those of a desperate man.

The footsteps of a passer-by roused him, and he went to the window. Looking out he saw flit by the messenger dispatched by Murad, to those on whom he relied for the banishing, and in a moment he was alone again, seeing no one in the street.

Presently another footstep came by and again he went to the window and looked out.

This time he caught sight of a figure which had stopped near the shanty and was coming back to watch it.

"It is the blind Chinaman," said Mormon Sol under his breath. "The evil genius of my life is hatching some mischief and I half believe he has carried out his promise that he would put eyes in his fingers and see as well as ever."

He continued to watch Wun Look as he crept forward through the dark world which he inhabited, and when he found himself near the door he put out his hand in search of it.

The Mormon Saint leaned forward and seemed to wait for Wun Look to open the portal, but moments passed and the Chinaman did not appear.

At last the blind man shuffled off once more, and looking down, the Mormon saw sticking underneath the door a bit of paper which he picked up with a smile.

"What is this?—a warning from the man from China?" he laughed, going to the light and bending over the table as he unfolded the note.

In another second he was deciphering the scrawl on the discolored paper and this is what rewarded him:

"You are in danger and the mountains want you if you value the life of a Mormon murderer. Go at once for the cloud is about to burst and the hand of Murad is ready to fall and crush out the life the whole world hates."

Mormon Sol read this three times before he raised his head. When he looked up he smiled and thought he saw a face at the window, but it vanished when he sprung forward.

"This is not Wun Look's work," said the man. "The Chinaman could not warn me. He is the messenger of some one else; he was sent with this letter to my door. So they are getting ready. Why, haven't they read the defiance I posted alongside of the decree? They know that I am not going, and as for Silver Steve and his last words—I will remain and face fate."

Mormon Sol tore the letter into fragments and threw them at his feet. The next moment he had drawn a revolver and was looking at it in the faint light that came in at the window. His tall figure was to be seen by any keen-eyed passer-by, but he did not seem to heed the exposure he was making of himself.

All at once the tramp of men was heard.

The Mormon looked up and waited. He heard the tramping outside, and seemed to interpret it rightly.

"They are here," he said, coolly. "I have to fight for my life, but Murad will wish he had never crossed swords with the man from Salt Lake."

Nearer and nearer came the marching, and when Mormon Sol looked out once more he saw that his fear had not deceived him.

In the street, beyond the door of the shanty, stood a dozen men, all stalwart fellows in dark shirts and cool of mien. He saw that while some carried the inseparable Winchester across their arms, the majority gripped revolvers, and that all were armed to the teeth and were ready to carry out the decree if it took the last man in line.

A short silence followed the halting of the gang in the street, and then the voice of the tall man at the head of the line was heard.

At the first demand Mormon Sol went to the door and threw it open so quickly that half of as the line seemed to fall back in amazement. It was evident that the answer, so prompt and cool, was not expected.

The figure of the man from Mormondom stood in his doorway with nothing in his hands, so far as the toughs could see, and while he waited for the captain of the band to proceed, a smile seemed to flit across his smooth face of bronze.

"We are the men of Moonstone, Sol of Utah," said the captain. "We have given you three hours in which to quit the camp, but you have disobeyed and still hold the fort."

"You have read the document I posted alongside the decree? You need not have come to me for my reply."

"We read the defiance, but that is not an answer to the decree of banishment."

"That is all the answer I have."

The captain of the Regulators looked at his men and then back to Mormon Sol he came.

"There can be but one issue to this business. You are an exile banished from Moonstone and we are here to carry out the sentence of the court."

"The court, eh?" smiled the man in the door. "You are here, you mean, to carry out the wishes of your master, the man who appears only in the background and who when he wants his plans carried out, remains away and sends his slaves to see to it."

The voice was sarcastic, but it did not have the effect expected.

"Do you refuse to come with us?" asked the leader of the band.

"I refuse to be driven from Moonstone without a chance to face the man who wants me banished."

"You refuse to quit camp and intend to show fight where the odds are vastly against you?"

There was no immediate reply; the figure of Mormon Sol was seen to lean back into the shanty and for a moment was lost to view.

"Will you take me to your master? Will you conduct me to Murad, the Mysterious?" he asked when he reappeared.

"We carry out our orders to the letter."

What would have been Mormon Sol's next reply if a certain event had not occurred will never be known; but at this juncture there came down the street the form of a man at whom the band looked with expressions of astonishment.

Near them halted Silver Steve, and with face turned toward the cabin, he seemed to await with interest the reply of the man from Utah.

Mormon Sol saw him and turned away.

"We can't wait all night on you," said the captain. "We are to carry out the decree of the court—the orders of Murad, the Mogul, and if you refuse to go with us peaceably, why, we must take you off with force. This is to be the end of the whole matter."

The speaker turned to the men at his command and threw up his hand. Instantly the form of the Mormon was covered by a dozen weapons, and the men of the mines seemed to hold their breath as their faces fell and they looked over the shining barrels into the calm face in the doorway.

It was a moment of terrible suspense. Silver Steve looked on and saw the mien of the would-be executioners, and Mormon Sol himself showed no more fear than the men who held the deadly weapons.

Suddenly the hand of Mormon Sol went up, and for the first time all saw that it was armed. The revolver he thrust forward in spite of those that already covered him, glittered in the moonlight, and held as it was by a steady hand, it was as threatening as those gripped by the line in the street.

"I have marked your captain," said Mormon Sol. "I will kill him if I am riddled by your bullets. A man who knows how, will shoot with a bullet in his heart and the life of your leader hangs on the triggers you press."

There was no answer.

"Show me your Mogul," he went on. "Take me to the man who writes decrees and has them posted. Let me stand face to face once more with Murad, the Mysterious, and if he says 'go,' then go I will."

This seemed to be fair enough, for the men of Moonstone felt that the decree would never be

reversed, and they looked at one another while Mormon Sol faced them in the door.

But the leader of the toughs did not like to assume the responsibility, and it was with a feeling of relief that he saw Silver Steve come to his rescue.

"Take him to Murad," said the Silver Sport. "Take him down to the Mogul of Moonstone. There can be but the one reply to Mormon Sol's questions. The end will be the same, though a little delayed."

"Come, then," said the captain of the band. "We will conduct you under guard to Murad."

The figure of Mormon Sol stepped from the shanty and in a moment he was on his way to the house of the Mogul of Moonstone. There was a gleam of triumph in his eyes and he carried himself, the men thought, with the air of a conqueror.

The distance was not great and the men, filing across the Plaza, drew up in front of Murad's home.

But what had become of Silver Steve? The Branded Sport had vanished, and those who looked for him looked in vain.

Murad, waiting in the little room for the return message which would tell him that the hand of the Mormon was powerless for harm, started when he saw before him the man he had sent off with the order for the carrying out of the dread decree.

"He is out yonder," said this man. "He insisted on seeing you, and Silver Steve said he should, so we brought him along and—"

"What! you have Mormon Sol out yonder and alive?" broke in the Mogul. "You were to carry out the decree to the letter."

The man turned pale and stammered something which was interrupted with an oath from the Man of Mystery.

"Bring him in!" he said, hoarsely. "Bring him and leave us alone. I can do it myself."

Mormon Sol saw the messenger come back and heard him whisper to the captain of the band. In another instant he was seized by the arm and conducted toward the house, and when the door was opened he was pushed inside and told to settle the matter once for all with the Mogul himself.

"I have won the toss of the death copper," said Mormon Sol to himself as he went forward, and then the door that had opened in the hall showed him the man who was waiting for him at the little table with not a sign of pity in the eyes that looked across it and with something in the hand that hung at his side.

The man from Utah came forward and stopped in front of Murad. He had shut the door with a backward motion of his hand and they now stood face to face, neither speaking for the moment as they eyed one another like tigers.

"Well, I let you come on and face me," said Murad. "You are here to tell your old story. I know what you would say and the decree has spoken for me."

Mormon Sol seemed to bend toward the man across the table, but in reality his figure did not move.

"I understand the situation. You were afraid to wait till she returned; you thought you would settle with me while she was absent and blot me from the book of humanity. You have played a cool hand, but you forget that the secret lives after I am dead—that the hand which has ruled elsewhere has written out the story of two lives and that it will talk after Mormon Sol has become food for worm and vulture."

The lips of the listener seemed to twitch.

"What is it you want?" he asked.

"A truce till Lady Jezebel returns."

Murad, the Mysterious, thought a moment.

"I grant it," he said. "I grant a truce till she comes. After that, war to the knife!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONFRONTED BY FATE.

BRUSHWOOD'S had something to talk about that eventful night.

Mormon Sol, the man against whom Moonstone had banded, had forced Murad to grant a truce and that while the decree of banishment still appeared on the tree on the Plaza.

What was this mysterious power the man from Utah held over the Man of Mystery? Why did Murad cower in Mormon Sol's sight and when he could have ordered Sol's death by the mere lifting of a finger, why had he backed out and let the Mormon walk out of his house and back to his own shanty, a free man?

The gamblers of Brushwood's talked about these events over their cards and wine until the small hours of the night announced the near approach of another day.

The men of chance wondered what would happen when Lady Jezebel returned and the truce had been extended to her coming home. They had been informed that this was the case, and the last ones to depart from Brushwood's looked askance at Mormon Sol's shanty and wondered again what was the Mormon's power.

Standing at the little window that looked out upon the street and across one corner of the Square, Amber, the Beautiful, saw men passing back and forth. The young girl knew what had

taken place; she had been told of the unexpected outcome of the arrest of Mormon Sol and she, too, wondered what would happen when Lady Jezebel, her "mother," came back.

"He may go anyhow and not wait for her return," said Amber aloud while she stood at the window. "The truce he proposed may be nothing but a breathing-spell in which he hopes to find the avenue of escape. I would to Heaven he would clear out, for something tells me that this man is my evil genius, the dark shadow across my pathway."

The girl stopped suddenly for there came toward the house a figure she recognized at once, and with a cry of "Thirza" she drew back and watched the Mormon's wife from the deep interior of the little cabin.

Thirza reached the door and knocked lightly with her long, skeleton-like fingers.

When Amber opened it and saw the eager, yet strange, look in the woman's eyes, she thought that something important had brought Thirza to the cabin.

There was a look of fear and half-terror in the eyes that regarded Amber for some little while, and when Thirza started forward and suddenly caught the girl's arm, she fell back and cried out:

"What means this, woman? Why am I clutched like a prisoner?"

Thirza laughed, but the pallor on her face did not leave it.

"So, you are the one in the web, are you? You are the last victim of the Mormon trap?"

"The last victim?" exclaimed Amber. "What mean you? I am in no trap, and what is more, I don't intend to be captured by the spider that once held you in the web."

It was a singular look that beamed in Thirza's eyes.

"You don't, eh? Poor soul! you don't know what is going to happen. You talk as if you can save yourself, and yet you have been bartered without a word of remonstrance. You won't be caught, eh? Why, you are in the dead-fall now."

Amber could but look at the speaker, and wonder what all her words meant.

"If you mean—" she began.

"That's what I mean!" cried Thirza. "You are in the trap—the same one that caught me, years ago. You don't know it, perhaps; but his grip is on you now."

"The decree of banishment has been posted against him."

"So it has, and he has forced a truce from the writer of the decree. What does the power of Murad, the Mysterious, amount to in presence of Mormon Sol? Girl, I pity you."

All this went through Amber like a knife. She fell back the full length of Thirza's arm, and for a moment looked at her like a person in a dream.

"Do you come to me to say this, and to laugh at the woes of the person you say has been caught by the schemes of this wretch who once wrecked your life? Why don't you run off and perish somewhere by the wolves of the mountain rather than fall back into the hands you seem to hate?"

"He is tired of Thirza. You see I have lost my beauty while you are as fresh as a rose—"

A cry from Amber's lips broke Thirza's sentence.

"Where is Mormon Sol?" she asked, almost savagely.

"Never mind that. He will show up when he comes to claim his captive. When Lady Jezebel comes back and the truce is at an end—"

"Then there will be war!" cried Amber.

"Foolish girl, there will be a wedding. War! Do you think Murad and Lady Jezebel will risk the secret of this game? Do you flatter yourself that they will fight openly the man who knows enough to crush them, and who some day, if they fight him, will be the Mogul of Moonstone—"

"Mormon Sol?"

"Mormon Sol!" said Thirza, quietly. "The truce will last forever after Lady Jezebel's return. There will be no war."

"You came to me to say this?"

"No, not to say this alone. I have another mission. I want to see the pictures Lady Jezebel left behind when she went off."

"The pictures?" exclaimed Amber. "Who told you that she left any behind?"

"Never mind that, girl. I want to see the pictures. You know where they are."

Amber did not move, but looked into the face of the Mormon's wife as if she would read her *motif* there.

"I will keep the secret," continued Thirza. "I am Mormon Sol's wife, but I can keep secrets from my husband. The picture, girl."

Amber crossed the room and stooped in one corner. The eyes of the woman followed her and watched her every movement. When she rose and came back she held something in her hand which Thirza eyed like a hawk.

"There are but two of them," said Amber.

Thirza put forth her hand and took the packet from Amber, then, going to the light, she opened it and stood like a statue near the window.

Suddenly she came back, her face strangely pale and her lips twitching in a nervous manner.

"Did she ever tell you the story of these pictures?" she asked.

"I never asked her for it," said Amber.

"Then, you know nothing about them?"

"Nothing much. I believe that one is the portrait of Lady Jezebel, and the other one—"

The beauty of Moonstone hesitated and looked into the face before her.

"You believe it is a picture of yourself when a small child, do you?" said Thirza. "Is that what you were going to say, Amber? Girl, there are some things you don't know, and if you leave it all to her there will be some things which you will never hear of."

"I will wait," said Amber. "I will let the future tell me what it cares to tell."

"You will, eh?" and Thirza came forward, her face pushed out and the pictures in her hand. "You will wait for it to tell you everything or nothing. Don't you recall anything connected with your girlhood? Maybe you never had one."

"I remember being under Lady Jezebel's care years and years ago. I know that I came to Moonstone with her, that she has been my guardian a long time, and that I lost my father—"

"You lost him, did you?" interrupted Thirza.

"You think that because I have been Mormon's wife and shut up in a Mormon's cage, I know nothing of the people who inhabit this world of crime and cunning men. You deem Thirza, the Sixth, as I have been called, ignorant of the lives of those who never lived in Mormondom. Ha, girl, you don't know me!"

She drew back, still looking at Amber and feeling the eyes of the startled and half-frightened girl riveted to her.

"For God's sake, if you know anything, keep it!" cried the beauty of Moonstone. "I don't want to know anything about the past for I will face the future and meet what comes as bravely as a young girl can. I loathe, despise the man who captured you with his net. I hate, if I hate any living soul, the person called Mormon Sol, for, among other things, I more than half-believe that he robbed Wun Look of his eyes."

"You believe that, do you?" exclaimed Thirza. "What makes you think so?—his long, soft, silken fingers?"

"In part, yes."

"Why should Mormon Sol, strong as he is, fight in that manner a Chinaman?"

"I don't know," confessed the trembling Amber.

"But you think he robbed Wun Look of his orbs? You accuse Mormon Sol of something he may not be guilty of, all on account of his soft fingers."

"You may have felt them yourself," said Amber. "You have been his wife."

"I am his wife still," was the quick response. "I am still the wife of the Mormon spider to whose web you have been consigned by Murad and Lady Jezebel."

"No, not by Lady Jezebel?"

"Why not? She swore to hide me from Mormon Sol, and took me to a mine where she said I would be safe and that she would be the last person to betray me. What happened? When Mormon Sol said something to her—when he went to this same Lady Jezebel and demanded Thirza the Sixth—she revealed my hiding-place—even came to where I was and told me that she could hide me no longer, and I went back to the hands of my lord. This woman is capable of anything, girl. She will sell her own offspring to save herself from the hands of justice and to rescue Murad, the Mysterious, from the clutches of the outraged law."

Amber heard all this with blanched cheeks. She could not believe that Lady Jezebel would descend to such depths of duplicity, but the words of Thirza ringing in her ears filled her with alarm and suspicion, and for a moment she stood spellbound in the presence of the Mormon's runaway wife.

"Wait and see, then," said Thirza, throwing the pictures on the table. "Stand where you are and take what comes. You think the truce will be broken by open war when Lady Jezebel comes back, do you? What took her to the mountains?"

"I cannot tell you."

"She did not tell you, then? She did not let you into that secret before she rode off? A nice mother she is to ride away and leave her child in the net of the Mormon fisherman, and never tell her the semblance of the truth."

A bitter laugh that seemed to transfigure Thirza rung in Amber's ears, and she saw the tall form draw toward the door, where it stopped and looked back.

"Why don't you marry before she comes back?" said Thirza. "Why don't you take the only saving precaution and baffle this man, who knows no mercy when love is in the scales? With you a wife, he dare not take you to his home beyond the hills of gold. I was foolish when he came to me, but I was infatuated; but you say you hate him. As surely as the heavens bend above us, girl, you will be delivered over to Mormon Sol when Lady Jezebel comes back, I care not what her mission abroad is, and how much she despises and hates him."

The young girl who listened to these words did

not move, but continued to stare at the speaker by the door. Perhaps she thought of Wun Look's advice, but she did not speak.

"As a bride, he dare not touch you. He could not carry out his designs, and Murad and Lady Jezebel would be baffled when they came to silence this secret-keeper by giving him a girl-bride in the heart of the Gold Hills."

"Is that your advice?" said Amber at last. "Do you advise me to become some one's wife before Lady Jezebel comes back?"

"If you don't before, you will after that event."

Amber seemed to reflect. Her form moved to the table, and for a moment, overcome by the terror of what appeared a desperate situation, she sunk into a chair there, and was watched for a second by Thirza, whose face underwent a change.

"You might kill yourself and escape," said the Mormon wife, bending toward the silent Amber. "That would be cowardly. That would bar you from heaven! The other way is the best one out of the trap. But it all rests with you, girl. Your happiness is in your hands."

The door opened and shut, and when Amber of Moonstone looked up again she saw that she was the only tenant of the little place she called home.

"Merciful Heaven! have they succumbed to the power of this man from Utah? If they have, all is lost!" she cried.

CHAPTER XXV.

LADY JEZEBEL'S HUNT.

DURING these events in Moonstone a woman who rode a horse lithe of limb and sure of foot, was threading the meandering trails of the wild gulch country some distance from the capital of the Gold Hills.

Night had fallen round her, but this did not deter her from entering another gulch, nor frighten the steed, which seemed to be as devoid of fear as the person in the saddle.

Far overhead, towered the walls of the pass, and here and there in them, were crevices almost large enough to secrete and shelter a band of men.

Lady Jezebel, whom we have seen quit Moonstone at the command of Murad, the Mysterious, seemed to be near the end of her strange journey. She looked up and appeared to note the conformation of the rocks above her, and now and then with a smile she noticed that they were not so tall and bare.

"It must be near here, if I am on the right track," she said aloud to herself, the faithful steed pricking up her fox-like ears at the sound of her voice. "I cannot have missed the trail, for I have been here before, and it is not likely that on a mission of this kind I would go astray."

She rode on a little further, and at last drew rein and dismounted.

The scene about her was wild enough to have turned the cheeks of a person cooler-headed than the Queen of Moonstone.

Grasping the bridle-rein, she led her horse down the pass, and after a brief trip, stopped and went toward one of the walls.

"Here is the mark," she said, laying her hand on a huge rock which stood up alongside the trail as tall as the tallest man. "This is the rock, and the other mark must be near."

She dropped the rein and passed round the rock, getting between it and the gulch wall, then she used her eyes besides moving her hand over the stone. She seemed to be looking for something that avoided her, for she leaned toward the wall, and sometimes started as if her hunt had been successful.

But that which she looked for was not there, for, disappointed, she moved on again, and went down the pass almost to the end of it.

"Can it be possible that there are two rocks of the same formation?" she asked herself. "It must be so, or else something has happened to rob me of the fruits of this journey of life or death."

She stopped again, for before her rose a stone just like the one which had attracted her in the middle of the gulch, and on going up to it she uttered a cry of joy, and bent over a dark spot, seemingly on the ground itself.

But instead of being on the ground, the dark place was at the foot of the gulch wall, and in less than a minute Lady Jezebel had fearlessly disappeared.

Feeling her way down what appeared to be a corridor running into the depths of the earth, she went on and on, now stopping as a sound seemed to strike her trained senses, and now halting for breath, for the air was close and unhealthy.

She came to a long halt at last.

Lady Jezebel stood in what seemed a vaulted chamber chiseled out of solid rock by hands of man, but, in reality, it was one of those marvelous rooms formed by nature in the heart of the wonderful Gold Hills of the San Juan Range.

She seemed at home now for the little torch which she had lighted showed her the length and breadth of the chamber and she went direct to one corner and bent forward.

"It is here yet!" she cried, drawing from a

niche in front of her a small box, flat and covered with dust. "I thought it was somewhere, and if the secret is still here we are safe and hold the winning cards against this man-monster from Mormondom."

Lady Jezebel did not wait to see what was in the box so strangely located, but turned and began to go back to where she had left her horse. Her torch went out, but this did not seem to frighten her for, instead of lighting it again, she groped her way by feeling the wall at her right, and with the box under one arm, she kept on and on until she thought she should be near the entrance to the cavern.

"Heavens! where am I?" said Lady Jezebel. "I should have been at the opening before this, but here I am, still in the dark and I seem no nearer the entrance than I was an hour ago."

Still holding to the box, she struck a match on the wall and held it overhead.

She saw an odd looking chamber which showed her no outlet but the one by which she had entered, and for a moment she looked at the one opening with a face suddenly blanched for she saw that she had come to a place entirely unknown to her.

"I must go back," she said. "I can feel my way along the wall and reach the spot I started from. I have three matches left and they will see me through."

Will they, Lady Jezebel? We will see.

Turning back she began the homeward journey, but stopped suddenly, for the wall felt strangely beneath her hands and for a second she stood and reflected.

Another match was struck and when she held it above her head a wild cry broke over her lips.

"Another strange room! Heavens, I am lost!"

The second match helped her not, for it soon went out, and biting her lips, Lady Jezebel went on once more with the grim look of a woman stricken with despair.

Back she came to the chamber which had first startled her. She knew it by the walls underneath her silken hand; a match was not needed to tell her where she was.

But she struck it—struck her last friend in the dark and watched its little flame go out, leaving her in Cimmerian darkness and without a single sound to break the monotony of the awful silence.

The Queen of Moonstone was lost in the depths of a cavern only a part of which was in any degree known to her. Before her last match went out she looked at the box and seemed to curse it with her eyes.

It had lured her to this fatal spot. For she had left the wild drama being played in Moonstone and had risked her life among the wolf-infested gulches of the Gold Hills.

That she felt the horror and almost helplessness of her situation was apparent by the drawn lips and white face.

"A thousand curses on the head of the man who came to our paradise and broke it up!" she cried. "Would to heaven I had my hand at his throat! I would like to choke out the life of the Mormon serpent and thus rid the world of its greatest curse. I would like to stand before this Mormon devil and show him the papers hidden in the little box that lured me to this place. I carry under my arm the weapons that can baffle him, but alas! they are harmless with me buried in this unknown tomb."

Lady Jezebel started forward once more in a wild, half despairing effort to find her way back to her horse and mount him for the ride to Moonstone. But she stopped again and threw the box from her.

"I shall die where I am. They will find me long after the battle has been fought and lost. They will come hither and some time discover the box and its secrets, but too late to save Murad from the power of his foes."

Suddenly there came to her ears a sound which threw her forward, and for a moment kept her standing like a statue in a listening attitude in the dark.

"I know what that means. The wolves have scented Selim. They have discovered the horse that brought me to this place. My last hope is gone!"

Lady Jezebel suddenly thought that she might be nearer to the entrance than she fancied, and as she went on, the howls of the wolves grew more and more distinct and she took hope. She had found the box, thrown aside in a paroxysm of despair and it was once more under her arm, not to be relinquished again until she was out of the maze of darkness and death.

"I must be near the cavern's mouth for I feel the wind on my face," she said. "Thank Heaven! I have found the right trail at last."

It seemed so; at any rate it was enough to encourage her and she kept on until she reached a spot where she stopped and eagerly caught her breath for the last advance.

Now she saw something that startled her. There were stars ahead.

No, they were eyes!

As Lady Jezebel laid her hand on her revolver and waited and watched in the gloom she saw the fireballs move to and fro! She knew that the wolves had entered the cave and that they stood between her and the gulch wall.

The woman shrunk back, hugging the wall and looking ahead into the shining orbs of the eager pack.

If they had found her in the mountain, Selim would have outran them; but they had found her in the cavern and she could not go far.

She stood her ground, and with the coolness of a man, looked into the glaring eyes before her.

"To find the secret only to die at the hands of a lot of demons!" she said. "This is the sum of my life. I have the weapon that will strike down the arm of Mormon Sol; but it is useless. Merciful Heaven! must I perish with success in my grasp?"

Nearer and nearer crept the eyeballs that shone like a lot of stars.

The woman fell back to the further wall and clutched the revolver which she had drawn. She leaned forward when she stopped as if she would challenge the pack, and saw them come on, now and then giving vent to little yelps which told her that they were closing in on her for the feast of blood and flesh.

Lady Jezebel raised the weapon, but hesitated to open the battle.

She knew that the first shot would precipitate the whole pack upon her, but she could shoot again and again and then perish in an instant.

"My life to be back in Moonstone!" she said, through shut teeth. "I would give it freely to stand before Mormon Sol with the weapon in my hand; but to perish miserably here and never perhaps be found—that is horrible!"

Lady Jezebel fired straight among the glowing eyeballs and heard a wild yelp of pain in return.

The wolves fell back. The shot seemed to discomfit them for a moment.

She fired again and again, each time feeling that she had not missed the living targets, for yells told her that the balls had found bone and muscle.

With the weapon clutched in her right hand and hugging the box, she suddenly turned and fled.

Down the corridor she went, touching it with her shoulder as if she could guide herself by this means, and when she had gone some distance she paused for breath and listened with her heart in her throat.

She did not hear the pack now. She heard nothing at all of the hungry horde which she had faced with the energy of desperation until seized with a spasm of flight.

Lady Jezebel had followed the corridor in all its devious windings; she knew not where she was, but something seemed to tell her that she had outwitted the wolves and that they had lost her in the heart of the cavern.

She went on again and then rested for good. To go deeper into the wonderful cavern would be to become irrecoverably lost to sight and sound. She would go back again.

Back she went, but not for long. The corridor suddenly stopped. She was mystified.

Putting up one hand in hopes of feeling some peculiar formation of wall she uttered a cry for natural steps seemed overhead.

It seemed to her like a stairway in the solid rock. Whither did it lead?

The Queen of Moonstone did not stop to consider.

She made the box for which she had risked so much fast to her waist, and began the ascent in the dark.

Up she moved, hand over hand, and placing her feet one after the other in the niches in the wall.

The journey seemed endless, but the woman who was cool under the most exciting circumstances of life, persevered.

"I will climb to the heavens themselves!" she said. "I am going back to face Mormon Sol, and break his hold. I don't intend to die here, no matter how deep and dark this place is."

She seemed to succeed at last, for she felt the breath of outside air on her face. She had felt it before, but the wolves had come between; but now the dare-devil eyes were not in her path.

"I am safe," she said, as she stood once more in the open air. "I have the box safe, too, for here it is—Great Heavens! everything is lost!"

Lady Jezebel was staring at the box which was both lidless and empty!

In running through the corridor a sharp rock must have torn off the lid, and the contents of the box were gone.

Lady Jezebel fell to the ground like one dead.

CHAPTER XXVI.

EVERYTHING WAITS ON MOONSTONE'S QUEEN. THERE was waiting for Lady Jezebel in Moonstone.

The armed truce declared between Murad and Mormon Sol was watched by the entire camp, and among those who watched it with much interest, was Silver Steve, the Branded Sport.

There was in the Mormon's eyes a look of triumph which he did not try to conceal.

Keeping close to his shanty, he went out but

little, not that he feared the ruling power, but because he did not care to stir up the animosities of eager men, by too much contact.

Murad was ill at ease. It nettled him to think that he had made a truce with this man, that he had submitted to the proposal which had brought it about, and while he sat in his little room, sullen and sour of mien, and thought the whole matter over, he wondered when Lady Jezebel would come home and break it up.

There came to the house of Murad, the afternoon after the making of the truce, a man at whom the Mogul looked twice as he seated himself across the table from him.

It was Diamond Don.

It was the first time the Sparkling Sport had crossed the Mogul's threshold, and the two men thus thrown together seemed to feel that a crisis in their lives was at hand.

"The truce is on yet," said Murad, looking into the face of his visitor. "I am waiting for Lady Jezebel, and when she comes it will be broken."

"Will you break it?"

"I will break it!"

Diamond Don the ferret look steadily at Murad for a moment and then said:

"I thought that perhaps Lady Jezebel might break it. When she returns with the weapons she will be armed."

The Mogul fell back and from across the table glared at the man near him.

"What do you know about Lady Jezebel's mission, Diamond Don?"

A smile seemed to light up the eyes of the Sparkling Sport.

"Not much, Murad—not much," he said. "I don't know much that is going on in the outside world, but I am aware of the fact that you have Mormon Sol to fight, and that unless Lady Jezebel returns with the proper weapons, you will have to resort to harsh measures on your own hook, or he will win."

These words seemed to mystify Murad, the Mysterious, but he was not disconcerted long.

"You are a puzzle yourself," he said, leaning toward Diamond Don. "You are not the man you seem, Diamond Don, eh? You are some one else."

There was no answer with lips, but the eyes of the Sparkling Sport said much.

Murad arose and went to a safe in one corner of the room and opened it.

Diamond Don saw him stoop for a moment, and when he came back he held in one hand a little box which he placed on the table.

At the same time he took out two revolvers and laid them alongside the box.

"I think I know something about your mission," he went on, looking into Diamond Don's eyes. "I ought to know what brought you to Moonstone. You are but another enemy for me to fight, that is all."

"How another enemy?"

"Never mind. The house is shut up and we are the only tenants of it this afternoon. These two revolvers are good ones, or would you prefer your own?"

"I don't understand you."

"What, don't you, really? You must settle with me here before you quit the house."

"What, fight you, Murad?"

"That's it exactly. We will fight here in this room. See, I lower the curtains and light the lamps. The contents of the box on the table are the stakes we fight for."

"So the secret is in there?" said Diamond Don, looking at the little box.

"If you win you will see; if you lose you will lose the chase."

The ferret looked once more into the face before him and then leaned back in his chair.

"I did not seek you for this," he said.

"I know that, but I force you to the issue. Come, we fight!"

Diamond Don, startled by the coolness of Murad, reached across the board and picked up one of the revolvers.

"Perhaps you mistrust it," said Murad, with a smile. "You have weapons of your own, haven't you?"

"I am armed, Paul Nolan!"

At sound of the name, the Mogul seemed to stagger back, but he did not drop the revolver he had taken up.

"I say I am armed, Paul Nolan," repeated the detective. "I never go out weaponless, especially when I am on the trail of a human wolf. I am doubly armed this time, though I did not intend to unmask you to-day."

There was no reply.

Murad, the Mogul, sat upright in the chair, and looked at the man who had just called him Paul Nolan.

"It's the old trail, eh?" he said at length.

"An old trail gets fresh sometimes," was the answer.

"After a long time, eh? You are a persevering man. I could have blocked your game a dozen times, for I am master here."

"It does not seem so, when Mormon Sol forces you into a truce."

"Ho! I have sent Lady Jezebel to the trail. When she comes back you will see me armed as no man has ever been armed against his enemy, and then the truce will go to the winds."

"You will then crush the Mormon spider, will you?"

"I will more than crush him. I will kill!"

"If you can."

A strange smile flitted over the Mogul's face.

"We will forget the settlement of the old matter if we talk on in this way," he said. "You have weapons of your own, Diamond Don, so-called."

"Really, do you want to fight me?"

"Great Scott! why not?" cried the Mogul. "In some respects you are as dangerous as Mormon Sol."

"But I don't hold the same club over your head."

"That may be true, but I don't like you. You have found your man—found him at last. Have I changed much?"

"Not a great deal, but you have led a wild life since then. You have more than one name, but you see I haven't forgotten the old one."

"I see you haven't."

Was Diamond Don trying to gain time? Was he thinking to turn Murad from the thoughts of the duel he would force upon him in that room? This he could not do.

"Here, a truce to this!" cried Murad, springing up and shoving one of the revolvers toward the ferret. "I am going to fight you or kill you where you sit."

Diamond Don glanced toward the door and left his chair.

"We are alone in this house, as I have said. We can fight to the death here and no one will interfere."

"But not with these," and the ferret swept his hand toward the revolvers. "You ought to give the challenged party choice of weapons."

Murad laughed.

"I'll do it!" he cried. "I'll do it, Diamond Don. What do you choose?"

"Knives!"

The sententious answer seemed to stagger the Mogul for a moment.

"Close quarters, eh?" he exclaimed. "So be it."

He flung the revolver upon the table and opened a drawer at his left.

Taking out a knife with a goodly length of blade and an ivory handle, he stood once more erect before the ferret who had drawn a bowie and was at the edge of the table, watching him.

"The signal? what shall it be?" he asked.

"Make it to suit yourself."

The very coolness of the detective seemed to puzzle Murad, the Mysterious.

This man had invaded his house for a purpose which was not to take his life, yet he had not shrunk from the proposed duel.

"I can't. I won't fight," suddenly exclaimed Murad. "Every thing must stand aside till Lady Jezebel returns."

"Why wait for her? If you win this battle you can afford to wait with triumph on your banners, for you will feel that a stumbling-block has been taken from your path and that Diamond Don who has been on your trail these many months will trouble you no more."

"There is something in this."

"There is everything in it," said the ferret sport.

"But I can't fight you. I know you now and you have called me Paul Nolan; but not until Lady Jezebel returns!" and to the detective's astonishment the Mogul threw the knife across the room and it fell with a ring on the floor.

"I will not spare you when she comes," continued Diamond Don.

"I don't ask you to spare me. I will fight you. Fair warning, Diamond. I am still powerful here—"

"But a Mormon cows you."

"Pish! only for the time. I will show him."

"When she comes back?"

Murad smiled.

"When she comes back," he echoed.

Diamond Don put up his own knife and went back to his chair.

"Don't you know," he said, looking into Murad's face, "that all your power would take flight if the men of Moonstone knew the truth?"

"I know nothing of the kind."

"Then, you are blind to facts. You have covered your trail pretty well, but it was my duty—my oath—to find you."

"Did she make you her avenger by some means? Did she leave—"

Murad stopped as if he found he was going too far and the ferret-sport waited for him to go on, but he did not.

"Diamond Don—I know you by no other name, though you have one—I will turn on you. I tell you to your face, while I confess nothing, that when the game is played out I will be victor here. The hands of the Mormon will be powerless, and Murad, the Mysterious, will be on top. All this by the coolness of two persons."

"One of whom is Lady Jezebel?"

"One of whom is Lady Jezebel," said the Mogul.

"What if she never comes back?"

"But she will come. She will come with added power, and then we will laugh at your

story and proofs; we will turn on this Mormon spider and destroy him and his web."

The face of the man who spoke thus, was calm, and even roseate. His eyes sparkled, and reaching out his hand, the fingers of which were brown and silken in texture, he drummed half-aimlessly on the edge of the table, while he waited for Diamond Don to reply.

"You are almost powerless here," continued Murad. "The toughs of Moonstone are my slaves. How, then, can you expect to avenge the crime of the Ten Shanties?"

There was truth in every word Diamond Don heard.

Murad was the Mogul of Moonstone, and the dark-shirted men who delved and gambled were as much his slaves as ever were the Israelites the slaves of the Pharaohs.

Perhaps Diamond Don had met the wrong man. "Out yonder lie the mountains and the gulches," said Murad, standing erect with outstretched arm. "There are to be found the passes that lead back to the East, from which you started out on the fresh trail, which grew old in time. I am master here. I am still Murad of Moonstone, the man who is not afraid to meet his foes. Wait till Lady Jezebel comes, or go now. I care not what you do."

Diamond Don watched the hand as it fell at Murad's side, and the next moment the box which he had taken from the safe previous to the challenge, was picked up and held fast in his bronzed grip. His eyes emitted a mad, strange light. He was Murad, every inch of him, and while Diamond Don looked he wondered what Silver Steve would say to see him thus facing fate, and waiting for the return of the Queen of Moonstone—the handsome, fearless, but, at that moment, missing adventuress, who had united her fortunes to those of a man hunted down by a tireless ferret, who had been constituted the avenger of a crime as dark as any in the catalogue of sin.

"I will wait till she comes back," said Diamond Don. "Everything must hold back for her, I see. But when she comes I will not be idle. I know you, Paul Nolan, and I am here to avenge the crime of the Ten Shanties."

The answer was a laugh which rung in the ferret's ears, even when he had crossed the steps of Murad's domicile.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE VOW IN THE DARK.

SILVER STEVE could not repress a smile when he saw the outcome of the arrest of Mormon Sol under the reading of the decree posted by Murad's authority.

The Mormon had forced a truce, and was still a tenant of the little cabin he had inhabited before the event.

His last interview with the man from Utah had been of so exciting a character that he expected to have it renewed during the prevalence of the truce, and was on the lookout.

When Diamond Don came back from Murad's house, Silver Steve waited for him in the ferret's shanty, and Diamond Don dropped into a chair and laughed.

"The man is coolness itself," he said, looking at Steve, who eagerly waited for the result of the interview.

"You called him by his true name, did you?"

"I called him Paul Nolan."

"Well?"

"It fell upon him like a thunderbolt, but he was prepared even for that."

"But he did not confess?"

"He did not deny. I am on the right track. The man called Murad the Mysterious is Paul Nolan, the nabob of the Ten Shanties. He even referred to the old camp in the hills. But everything waits on Lady Jezebel."

"When will she return?"

"She is liable to turn up at any time. The truce waits on her, and when she shows up again we will see some lively work."

"Against Mormon Sol?"

"Against all who oppose Paul Nolan and his men."

Silver Steve seemed to reflect a moment, for he was silent, and Diamond Don watched him with interest.

"You won't try to save the Mormon's life again, will you?" asked the ferret sport.

"I have done in that direction," was the answer. "I have ceased to come between him and the ropes and Winchesters of Moonstone."

"I think it time for such resolve. Let the Mormon die, if he will not save himself when he can."

"But you don't know him."

"I know enough," said Diamond Don. "I know that this man has cursed the land for more than forty years. I know that he carried on his bosom the brand of brigandage, that he has been hunted by more than one band of avengers, but has always escaped, as if he bore a charmed life. You know how Duke Gorman shot at him, and how Murad met him on the street and fired a bullet at his heart?"

"I know all this. Mormon Sol is bullet-proof, as he should be."

"As he should be?" echoed Diamond Don.

"You don't hope that he will eventually escape the ropes and bullets of Colorado?"

"I have ceased to wish him that luck."

"But you have done so?"

Silver Steve looked away, but said nothing.

"When Lady Jezebel returns there will be some cool playing. Mormon Sol is ready."

"Do you think—"

The Branded Sport stopped and did not go on. He crossed the room and looking out, saw a man on the Plaza. It was Murad.

The figure of the Mogul of Moonstone, noticeable wherever seen, was standing there. Silver Steve had a good view of it and for some time he watched the man, forgetting, as it seemed, that Diamond Don was near and was looking over his shoulder at the same man.

"That man carries the secrets of more than one life in his bosom," said the ferret-sport. "He came from the East and knows the past history of Lady Jezebel and the story of Mormon Sol's life."

"But he keeps both to himself. The playing of the man from Mormondom does not make him turn on the serpent and meet him with his own weapons. The only time he tried it was when Duke Gorman came into Brushwood's and called Mormon Sol, Don Serpent. That showed that Murad, the man's master, knows about the past of this cool head from the land of the Saints."

"But he threatens to turn on Mormon Sol when Lady Jezebel comes home?"

"He says so."

"You may lose your prey after all."

Diamond Don started.

"Lose Paul Nolan?" he said. "Lose this man who is my sworn prey? I will not lose him! You forget that I was sworn by the side of a dying woman—the poor creature who was found beneath the ruins of Ten Shanties. No, I will not lose this man since I have bounded him down and know that Murad the Mysterious is Paul Nolan, the nabob who left his wife to perish alone and whom I found in the dark with her last words traced on the wall of the mine."

By this time the figure of Murad had vanished toward Brushwood's; but he had not entered that noted den.

Amber was startled to find herself face to face with the Mogul of Moonstone, and when he had shut the door behind him he came forward with his deep dark eyes riveted upon her.

"Lady Jezebel stays long?" said the beauty of the camp.

"She will come by and by," was the answer as Murad folded his arms and from against the wall looked at the young girl who seemed to wonder what had brought him to her house.

"You have had visitors of late?" continued Murad.

A slight flush suffused Amber's face.

"I can't avoid that," she replied. "They will come and it would not do to bar my door to all of them."

"That is true, as by so doing you might shut out a friend."

A short silence fell between the two.

"The Chinaman is one of your callers, isn't he?"

"Wun Look? The Celestial, blind now, has always been my friend."

Amber spoke kindly and with feeling.

"Has he discovered who robbed him of his last eye?"

Murad seemed to lean forward as he put the question and for a moment Amber did not speak.

"He says he will put eyes in his fingers some day and find the hand that mutilated him."

"Do you believe that, girl? Do you believe for a moment he can do this?"

"He did not mean to put real eyes there, only that he would tell the hand that robbed him by the sense of touch."

"The yellow man is mad. He will do nothing of the kind. Whom does he suspect?"

Amber shook her head.

"He keeps his own secrets, does he?" laughed Murad, his dark face relaxing for a moment.

"Wun Look would better keep at home and not hunt for the hand he hates so cordially. The next time it may take his life and—"

"How that person whoever he is must hate the pagan!" broke in the young girl.

"You don't know why he hates him so. You know nothing of the cause for that hatred. The Celestial has been a spy for years; he has held his hand against every person but the favorites of his own race, and I doubt not that the man who robbed him of his eyes had to do something to get even with him."

Amber turned upon Murad and was on the eve of speaking, but said nothing.

The Mogul of Moonstone turned away and for a moment averted his face.

"I am told that I have been bartered to the man from Mormondom."

He wheeled in an instant and the next moment his deep dark eyes were looking her through.

"Who told you?"

"I think I have it on good authority. I am told that both you and Lady Jezebel have promised that I shall become the wife of Mormon Sol, that he has a hold on you by which he will bring you to any terms he seeks. Is that true?"

Amber was looking straight into the face be-

fore her and she saw Murad, the Mogul, wince under her glances.

"What right have you to do this?" she went on. "By what authority do you bargain away my happiness and sell me to a human spider who has wrecked more than one life? What if I refuse to accede to the unholy bargain? What if I repudiate it in every shape and form and, instead of becoming his wife, become the bride of some one else?"

She stood before him, her handsome figure drawn up like the form of a princess and her face flushed with excitement. It was Amber's defiance.

Murad the Mogul looked at her a few moments, and seemed to study her face with the greatest curiosity.

"Wait till Lady Jezebel returns," he said.

"I hear that everything depends on her," was the answer. "They tell me that the Mormon waits for her with the same interest that you manifest in her coming home. But you have not answered me. Have you promised me to this man?"

The question was direct, and Murad met it with the coolness with which he met everything startling.

"You didn't know the circumstances, Amber," he said. "You cannot know what happened years ago—"

"It is a secret; I know that, and one which you fear will come out. Mormon Sol is its guardian, and when he came to you with the club he has ready for your head, and made his demands, you did not resist."

There was no reply.

"You let this man from Mormondom browbeat you, and even Lady Jezebel with all her coolness was cowed, as well. Why, she was forced by a word from Mormon Sol to betray the hunted wife whom she was hiding from Mormon slavery, and Thirza was given up to her taskmaster and is to-day his slave as much as ever."

"You must wait. You must stand fast till Lady Jezebel returns," said the Mogul. "She can't remain away much longer."

"Will to-morrow night see her back in Moonstone?"

"It surely will."

There was confidence in the speaker's tones, and Amber appeared pleased though she did not answer him.

"You have threatened to become a bride to escape the power of Mormon Sol," he went on.

"I will if that man forces his hand."

A strange curiosity seemed to take possession of Murad's mind. He took a step toward Amber and for a moment looked her squarely in the face.

"Have you chosen your lover?" he asked, with a smile. "Have you made choice of the person on whom you will bestow your hand for the express purpose of baffling the man from Utah?"

"Let that pass," cried the young girl. "Let that go, I say. We will meet these things as they rise before us."

"But I must know this. I must know upon whom you will bestow yourself in case Mormon Sol wins his last stakes."

Again the figure of Amber straightened in the light of her lamp, and Murad, looking at her, saw in her eyes a determined look that transfixed him.

"I have made my choice. I shall become the wife of Silver Steve!"

Murad, the Mysterious, fell back, and for a moment gazed at Amber from the door of the little room.

"You have chosen this man, have you?" he said. "You have said within your heart that you will become the wife of Silver Steve, the man with a mark, before you go to the altar with Mormon Sol."

"That is my decision."

Amber wondered what would be the outburst of wrath from the lips of the man who faced her. She looked at him, waiting calmly for his next words.

"You don't want to tell the Mormon this," said the Mogul. "You want to keep it from Mormon Sol, I say."

That was all. He laid his hand on the latch and opened the door.

Outside a figure hugged the shanty and the gleaming eyes of a man dressed in black watched the Mogul of Moonstone as he moved away.

It was Mormon Sol himself. The man from Utah had overheard the conversation and the hands that were shut and the eyes that blazed told that he had overheard, as well, Amber's statement of her resolution.

"The wife of Silver Steve, eh?" he said as he moved off. "She has decided to balk Mormon Sol by becoming the bride of the man with the brand. There is many a slip 'twixt cup and lip, girl, and this time there shall be a noted one."

He did not cross the Plaza, but went toward his shanty through the shadows of the straggling street, and when he shut the door he struck the dark wall with his clinched hand and swore an oath that would have blanched the cheeks of Amber, the beautiful.

But the girl did not hear it, consequently she was not frightened by the vow in the dark.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LADY JEZEBEL COMES BACK.

The new day came bright and beautiful.

In one of the shanties of Moonstone leaning against the rough sill of the little front window stood a man whose figure was neither tall nor large.

The face had a strange, almost sickening, expression and the hand that rested on the sill alongside of it was yellow and long.

Wun Look, the sightless!

For nearly an hour the Chinaman had stood there as if he could look out of the sightless sockets and see what was transpiring in the street beyond.

His sharp ears caught every sound and he would turn his head now and then as a noise came in from the camp outside.

The sun, mounting higher and higher in the heavens, threw his rays down the street and the shadow of the tree in the Plaza grew longer and longer.

The pagan seemed wrapped in thought. He would sometimes start as if a pain had shot through his mutilated head, but he would become calm again and resume his old attitude.

An hour passed and still Wun Look stood at the window.

At last there came toward the shanty a step which caught his ear and bent his body toward the door. It seemed that he even saw the man who came on until he gained the portal of the little shanty and halted there as though he had reached his destination.

The blind man turned to the door and waited.

The moment the door was opened and he heard a footstep inside, his lips were wreathed in smiles and he eagerly held out his hands.

"You are welcomed to the shanty of Wun Look, Silver Steve," he exclaimed. "I have been waiting for you, for something told me that you would come."

"Well, you haven't waited in vain," answered the Silver Sport.

"I never wait in vain. I shall some day feel in these hands of mine the throat of the wretch who robbed me of my eyes!"

The Branded Sport fell back and looked at the little man for a moment, wondering if what he said was prophecy, and then he went toward Wun Look and caught his hand.

"Are you, too, waiting for Lady Jezebel?"

A smile came over the face of the blind man and he stood against the wall with his face turned to the Sport who did not speak for some time.

"She will effect nothing," he said at last. "This woman with the gazelle eyes and the tiger claws will be as much in the hands of Mormon Sol as she was when she went off. Lady Jezebel has gone away to arm herself."

"How know you this, Wun Look?"

"She has gone to look for something that was hidden long ago."

"If she finds it, what?"

"She will bring it back and they will try to get out of their bargain with Mormon Sol."

"Their bargain?"

"Have you forgotten, Silver Steve? Don't you know that they have agreed to give Amber to this serpent from Mormondom in return for the sworn safety of the secret?"

"You have told me so."

"It is true. Wait till Lady Jezebel returns and see, but then it may be too late."

"Too late for what, Wun Look?"

"To save Amber from the web of the spider."

The Silver Sport looked from the shanty and saw no one. The street was clear of people at that time and the Plaza had no occupants.

"Wun Look, let me give up a little secret," and the Sport leaned toward the blind man and pressed his wrist significantly. "They will be baffled. There is another hunter in the game. There is a man in camp who is feared by Murad, the Mysterious, with a fear equal to that which he entertains for Mormon Sol."

"Who is he, Silver Steve?"

"They call him Diamond Don."

"Don't bank on his hand. Don't think that in the hands of this man, your friend and pard, lies the safety of Amber and the winning of the game against Mormon Sol. Diamond Don is without pards. Murad has but to lift his hand to rally round him the men of Moonstone. You know that, Silver Steve."

There was truth in these words and no one knew it better than the Silver Sport.

"Don't believe that Diamond Don can hold Murad when he has him in his grip," continued the Celestial.

"Why not?"

"The man is all fight, though Mormon Sol forced a truce."

"So is the avenger of the woman who died in the mine of the Ten Shanties."

Wun Look was silent for a brief moment.

"When will Lady Jezebel come?" he asked.

"Perhaps before night."

"I wish she were here now. I would like to hear her tread, for then they will open the battle to the death."

"You won't be in it, Wun Look?"

The Chinaman thrust out his long arms and showed the Silver Sport his dangerous hands.

"I will be in it—in it to the bitter end!" he

said in tones that almost startled the cool-headed Sport. "I will be in it and there will be eyes in my hands. You forget what I have to avenge. You look into my face, but see no light there. Yes, I will be in the fight and when the last play is made it will be mine!"

The little form of the pagan stood in the middle of the room away from every article of furniture, and Silver Steve saw that it quivered with excitement and that Wun Look was terribly in earnest.

"Hark!" suddenly cried the Chinaman, moving toward the window as if he still possessed the power of seeing.

Silver Steve ran to the same place, and leaned against the glass.

The sun was shining with power upon the narrow street, and the sky was not flecked with a single cloud.

"I heard her voice. I heard Lady Jezebel's shout!"

Silver Steve who had heard nothing, could not believe this. He looked up and down the street, but saw no signs of the woman who had gone off on the strange mission.

"I heard her, Silver Steve," cried Wun Look, with great positiveness. "She has come back!"

Silver Steve went to the door and looked out.

All at once he uttered a singular cry, and the Chinaman sprung to where he stood, and savagely clutched his arm.

"She is coming, I say!" he cried.

"By Jove! Lady Jezebel has come back!"

Silver Steve was looking at the tall woman who came down the street on foot. Her garments were dragged and torn, but her eyes had the flashes of an eagle's, and she was walking erect, and with the tread of one born to conquer.

The Branded Sport looked a moment, and then shut the door.

Falling back to where Wun Look stood, he waited for Lady Jezebel to pass the shanty, and while he waited he glanced at the pagan whose breath came in gasps, and who was as eager as himself, not to see the Queen of Moonstone, but to catch her step as she went by.

"Is she coming this way?" he eagerly asked.

"She is almost here, Wun Look."

"Tell me when she is opposite the shanty."

"I will tell you."

Presently the figure of Lady Jezebel was to be seen from the little window, and Silver Steve bent down and whispered her name to the sightless Chinaman.

In an instant the figure of Wun Look straightened, and he darted past Silver Steve to the door. Jerking it open, he sprung out and threw up his hand.

"Halt, Lady Jezebel!" he cried.

The Queen of Moonstone stopped, and looked in amazement at the little man in front of the shanty.

"You have come back, and just in time to knuckle again to the spider from Utah. You have come home in time to show your cowardice. Now go, and beg for mercy at the feet of Mormon Sol!"

Lady Jezebel seemed to start toward the man in the street; but she held off with an effort, and glared at him with eyes that seemed to snap.

"How did she look?" asked Wun Look when he came back to Silver Steve who had witnessed the whole proceeding. "Did she turn white and shut her hands?"

"No, she seemed about to start toward you, but she changed her mind and passed on."

"Without a word, eh?"

"Without a word, but her eyes said a good deal."

"Just like her! I thought I would set her against the Mormon spider before she meets him. I don't know, though. If Lady Jezebel will fight, and not knuckle, there will be war, sure enough."

Silver Steve was looking at the woman who was walking toward her own home, and he did not remove his eyes from her until he had seen her close the door of the house between them.

At home again!

The return went through the camp like a bolt of wildfire.

The men in Brushwood's stopped their games to discuss the return of Lady Jezebel, and all wondered what effect it would have on the armed truce between Murad and the man from Mormondom.

Murad, standing in the famous little room, was told of the home-coming by a man who ran to the house for that especial purpose, and for a moment he said nothing.

"Where is Mormon Sol?" he asked at last.

"At home."

"Did he see her?"

"I don't know."

"Did either of the pards see Lady Jezebel?"

"I can't tell you, Captain Murad."

"Time will tell," said the Mogul. "Time will tell who saw her come back."

That was all.

Murad relapsed into silence, during which the man went away, and the Mogul began to watch the door, as if the opening of it by some one outside meant life or death.

The hours passed, but Lady Jezebel did not come.

Every now and then Murad looked across the Square beyond the window, but did not move.

"Did she lose?" he asked himself aloud.

"Was her mission for nothing?"

At last there came a footstep to the door, and the Mogul of Moonstone heard a noise in the hall.

He fixed his eyes on the portal and waited.

Suddenly the door opened and he saw before him the white face and tall form of the woman for whom he had waited.

Lady Jezebel came forward and stopped at the edge of the table.

Murad, the Mysterious, did not move.

"I am back," said she. "I have returned. You see before you the woman who had success in her hand, but who was deprived of it at the moment of victory."

"What happened?" cried Murad. "Who robbed you of victory?"

"I found the box. I carried it nearly out of the cavern, but at the last moment it was torn from my hands and I lost its contents."

"But who robbed you? Were you tracked?"

"I was tracked by the four-footed trackers of the gulches. I was scented by wolves and, in flying from them, the lid of the box was wrenched off and I lost everything."

"You went back—"

"I went back and searched the corridors in the dark. I put eyes in my fingers' ends and made them see for me; but all in vain."

The man who was looking at her said nothing; but over his face crept a gleam of hope.

"They are there somewhere. You had no light?"

"If I had had matches I might have found the papers—I would not have come home without them. But we must not let them rot there among the damps of the old cavern."

Murad came round the table, still eying her, and she went toward him as if under the spell of some terrible impulse.

"I have held the truce for you," he said. "I agreed to it when I had Mormon Sol in my hands. I told him that it should last until your return, not a moment longer; but you have come back empty-handed, and now—"

"Your word shall be kept! Though I have lost the secret, the truce is at an end. From now on, war!"

The figure of Lady Jezebel seemed to leap an inch in stature and she brought down upon the table clinched hand that made everything shake when it struck.

CHAPTER XXIX.

EYES IN HIS FINGERS.

THE cause of Lady Jezebel's emphasis occupied alone the shanty from whose sole window he had seen her walk down the street and across the Square to Murad's house.

Mormon Sol watched her enter the place, and when she had vanished, he laughed aloud:

"I presume that ends the truce. I am now in for it, and we shall see what, if anything, she brought back from the mountains. I know she brought back her old spirit, and something of the old-time temper; but we will bend that, and she will understand that I am still the man with the secret."

Thus spoke Mormon Sol, while he waited for Lady Jezebel to emerge from Murad's domicile, and when she came back into the sunlight, and he caught sight of her walking home, he for a moment seemed on the eve of going out and stopping her as Wun Look had done.

But instead of doing this he changed his mind, and let her go back unmolested.

"She did not find what she wanted. I can tell that by her look. She was baffled by something in the mountains, and shows it on her countenance. What will she do? Will she resist or come under the rod as before? She knows what I can do, and it all lies with her. If she has a care for the man who is Mogul here, she will succumb to the inevitable; but if she fights, well and good."

All of which had but one meaning—that Mormon Sol was ready to meet his enemy, and that he had for her a weapon which he was not afraid to use.

The day waned and the sun, creeping down the sky, tinged the tips of the hills with its last beams, and then sunk out of sight behind them.

Moonstone did not look like a camp on the edge of a volcano. Brushwood's threw wide its doors, and the evening birds came, and perching in the great tree on the Plaza, warbled their songs as of old.

There were visits to Murad's house by several men known to be in the Mogul's confidence, but nothing very suspicious was seen. The Mogul himself did not appear on the scene, and the little house occupied by Lady Jezebel did not open its doors to let its mistress out.

Such was the situation when the last ray of sunlight vanished and the shadows grew into one everywhere.

Through them came a figure which had become a familiar one since the opening of the mountain drama we have been following through its various acts.

The groping movements of the little man with eyes in his fingers left his lonely shanty and crept toward Murad's house. Wun Look went over the ground which he knew well with a good deal of certainty, and one not knowing his condition, would have thought that the world was all darkness to him.

Nothing escaped the lips of the son of the Flowery Kingdom. He pursued his way to the edge of the camp, and by-and-by reached a place where the young trees grew thick and there were rocks, some as large as the little shanties of the miner sports of Moonstone.

Wun Look certainly had eyes in his fingers for he crept to a certain spot, and after a spell dropped out of sight.

It was like dropping into a well, for he vanished, and ere long might have been seen creeping through a long gallery where all was as silent and nearly as dark as the grave.

"I told them I would have eyes where few people have them," he chuckled to himself as he crept on. "I am on the trail of a secret, if I am blind. Murad would not let me enter at his door for he don't want a blind man in his house. He don't know that before I lost my eyes I tracked a mountain lion to the hole that leads to the mine under his house, and that when I put eyes in my fingers, I find that hole in the dark."

Wun Look continued to crawl on until he reached the door which, opening upward, led the way into Murad's house, and having found it, he leaned against the underground wall and became quiet.

Wun Look was in the New Ophir!

An hour passed over the Chinaman's head.

He remained quiet where he had halted, and while he stood in the gloom and waited—waited for something known only to him—he ran his silken hands over the walls and kept a still tongue in his head.

When he made another movement it was toward the door, and then he raised it without noise.

Wun Look was in the Mogul's house, and groping his way across the room he reached a door which he opened in turn, and crawled forward until he gained a flight of steps at the foot of which he stopped and crouched.

The sightless avenger remained there some time, when he moved on again fearless and confident.

What if he was being watched? What if the sharp eyes of Murad, the Mogul, were fastened upon him? What if Lady Jezebel was on the premises and was watching him with a knife in her soft, silken hand?

If the pagan feared either of these possibilities he did not stop and turn back. He kept on up the stairs, reaching at last a room where he felt his way to a window and past it to a couch.

It was the sleeping room of the Mogul.

Wun Look stopped at the bed and ran his yellow hands underneath the pillows. He appeared to feel everywhere, his fingers running hither and thither, but all the time empty save when they clutched some bedclothes as if he had discovered something.

Room after room of the Mogul's house the blind man searched.

At last he stopped and rested.

"Not yet," said Wun Look. "It eludes me, but I will find it, for it must be here."

Presently a sound came to his well-trained ears. In an instant he had concealed himself behind a curtain that hid one corner of the chamber and was quiet there.

The door opening admitted the tall figure of the Mogul and he stood for a moment in the middle of the room.

"Now for the last play!" Wun Look heard. "Now for the last throw of the fickle dice of fortune. I am in for the death-struggle. I am to face and dare the holder of the secret. I am to test the royalty of the men of Moonstone. If they fail me then the fight is over. I am to see tested the coolness of the woman who once before knuckled to Mormon Sol and gave up to him the creature she had sworn to hide from his vengeance. We have promised Amber to him, but we break the promise openly. We must fight everything and win, or play coward and lose all. There is nothing left but this, and the man from the East—the ferret sport of Moonstone—must go back empty-handed or never return at all."

Not a motion betrayed the presence of the blind Chinaman in the corner. He heard every word as it fell from Murad's lips and when the voice ceased and the footsteps of Murad, the Mysterious, crossed the room and went out, the pagan crept from his hiding-place.

"Gone, is he?" he said. "So they are going to fight Mormon Sol and Diamond Don, Silver Steve's pard? What shall Wun Look do? He told the Silver Sport that he would be in the fight and that the last card played would be his. Shall he eat his words? Shall he hold back and let the hand of another avenge his eyes if they are to be avenged at all? No!"

He found the door and went out.

Across the hall was another room and he groped his way to it.

"It is somewhere if he hasn't thrown it away," he said. "It was a little box and it

holds the secret which Diamond Don would like to have."

But the efforts of the blind Celestial promised to amount to nothing. He discovered nothing though he went from room to room, feeling his way everywhere and halting at last in the chamber occupied so often by the Mogul.

There the hands of Wun Look discovered the safe in the corner. He stopped there and ran his fingers over the steel door as if it had been discovered only to baffle him.

Nothing daunted by the discovery, the sightless pagan sat down before the door and with his ear glued to the safe manipulated the knob like a persevering burglar. He turned it in every direction. He cared not for what was passing around him beyond the house of secrets. His yellow hand turned it now to the right now to the left, while his ears touched the door and he listened to the fall of the works inside.

It was some time before the Celestial nodded approval of his work.

He clutched the knob with the frenzy of triumph, and, falling, swung open the heavy door.

Wun Look breathed hard but did not speak. He knelt in front of the open door and ran his hands forward. They encountered a lot of little doors and drawers, but what of that?

He opened these one after the other.

Into each one he dived his long yellow fingers and felt for something that seemed to elude him.

All at once he did find something around which his hands closed and which he snatched from the drawer where he found it.

A little box, not much larger than a snuff-box, and which, if Wun Look could have seen it, would not have excited much comment. But it seemed just what he had been looking for, for he held it close and after awhile shut the safe but retained the find.

Once more the safe which had yielded up its secret was close shut as ever and the Chinaman stood erect with the prize of the long hunt in his bosom.

Back he went, back to the door which let him down into the New Ophir and when he had dropped into the dark place, he crept toward the exit in the mountain.

The pagan went on and on, nor stopped until he felt the air of night on his cheeks when he seemed to take his bearings. Back over the same ground which he had traversed to the house of the Mogul he went, clutching the box he had found and at last entering his cheerless shanty, having performed a feat marvelous for one in his condition.

Wun Look was keeping his word; he was putting eyes in his fingers.

Once in the shanty, he took the box from his bosom and buried it beneath the rough flooring and in one corner.

"Stay there till I want you," said Wun Look to the box as he rose from his task. "The time will soon come for your resurrection. I will see that it comes."

He went to the door and listened.

Surely he had not been followed from the Mogul's house. He remained there a little while, then slipped down the street and groped his way to the open door of Brushwood's.

Planting himself at the door, but still in its shadow, he seemed to listen to the voices inside.

The ears of a blind man are sensitive. They soon learn to distinguish between the voices of many and this was the way with Wun Look of Moonstone.

A certain voice coming toward the door, startled him and he hugged the boards.

"Hello, thar! Listenin' yet, ar' ye?" said the same voice as a footfall greeted the pagan's ears.

"I have a right to listen, Buzzard Ben," was the quick answer. "They have taken my eyes and I must depend on my ears."

The burly figure of Buzzard Ben bent over the Chinaman. There was fire in the eyes of the miner-sport.

"Got a notion to choke you now," he hissed. "I'll never get a better chance. By Jupiter! I guess I'll do it."

The next instant the hands of Buzzard Ben swooped down upon the luckless pagan and he was jerked from the ground.

In vain did Wun Look throw his long arms about the hairy neck of the miner-sport. They were shaken off and he was held at arms' length, while a curse dropped like hissing water from the lips of the merciless tough.

Wun Look felt the hands of Buzzard Ben tighten on his throat as he was carried from the den. He struggled and tried to cry aloud, but the sound died on his lips. He was being deliberately choked to death by the wretch!

"You won't 'spell' my cards any more!" hissed the miner-sport. "You won't come creepin' about the tables makin' me the fool of fortune. I will throw you to the birds at the edge of the camp. You are goin' ter die, pagan!"

Suddenly there came from behind the tough a cry, at sound of which he turned.

"Drop that man!" said the same voice.

Buzzard Ben leaned forward, and seemed to make out the features of the speaker.

"You, eh? You want your pard, I presume? Wal, Silver Steve, thar he is!" and the wretch threw Wun Look from him, and the Chinaman

sunk to the ground, while the miner-sport sent one hand toward his hip.

But he never knew what was there.

There was a flash and a report, and quivering in death, the tall figure of Buzzard Ben fell back, grasping at idle air.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE FRINGE OF THE STORM.

"THIS man is my friend. He shall not be choked by a wretch and then thrown aside dead like a wolf."

Silver Steve stooped and picked up the limp body of Wun Look as he spoke and holding him up to the light a moment and seeing that the face was dark from the merciless choking administered by Buzzard Ben, he gave his victim one glance and walked away.

The man on the ground did not move. Buzzard Ben lay where the bullet of Silver Steve had overtaken him in his last act of cruelty, and those who reached him first heard the last gasp and saw the limbs straighten in death.

Immediately there went through the camp the cry "murder!" Men poured out of Brushwood's and came to the spot, all leaning forward to look down into the face of the man with the red beard and to note that the little dark spot over the eye marked the certain aim of the Branded Sport.

Meantime Silver Steve had carried Wun Look, not back to his own cheerless shanty, but to his own.

He saw that the Chinaman was not dead though near the brink of the grave and in a short time he had brought him back to life.

Before Wun Look could speak there came a hurried tramping to Silver Steve's door and he went forward.

"You've killed him!" said a voice as he opened the portal and looked out upon the ten figures standing in full view.

"I shot to kill," was the answer.

"You took the life of Buzzard Ben to save a pagan."

"Granted. I killed a white man to save a Chinaman. Is that it?"

"We don't like pagans here."

"I know it. I killed Buzzard Ben because he was choking the life out of a man who once stood between me and death. Wun Look was helpless in Buzzard Ben's hands; he was sightless and could not get out of his way."

The members of the incipient mob turned and looked at one another. They had come for the man who had just taken a life, and he was justifying himself in their eyes.

"You can have Wun Look if you spare Silver Steve," said a voice from the interior of the shanty.

"We don't want you," cried half a dozen men. "We want the man who killed Buzzard Ben."

"I am here."

The figure of Silver Steve seemed to increase in stature, and he looked with coolness into the faces by which he was confronted. He had faced mobs before, this cool-head had, though none, perhaps, quite as cool as that one.

"I shall not run away," he went on. "We are on the edge of a smoldering crater. Wait till after the eruption. Then I will talk to you."

There seemed something in this, and as if to settle the matter for the present, the figure of Mormon Sol came in sight, and the men of Moonstone saw with glowering eyes the man from Utah walk toward the Plaza and, in full view of all, fasten something to the tree there.

"We will wait, Silver Steve," said one. "You won't give us the slip, eh?"

"I will remain."

The crowd fell back and the Branded Sport, going back into the shanty, bent over Wun Look, whose yellow fingers twined about his hand.

"They have gone, eh?" said the blind pagan.

"There is another truce," smiled the Branded Sport. "I have patched up one with the pards of Moonstone."

"For how long?"

"Until after the battle."

"The fight for the Mogulship of Moonstone?"

"Yes."

The face of the Chinaman came close to Steve's cheek, and he whispered:

"It is under my floor—the box is there. You will find it when you want it, Silver Steve."

"The box, Wun Look?"

"The one I took from Murad's strong safe, awhile ago. I put eyes into my fingers and discovered it, as I said I would."

"In which corner is it?"

"In the one to the right of the door as you enter."

"It ought to be found at once."

"Get it, then."

Bidding Wun Look remain in his shanty, Silver Steve withdrew and went toward the Celestial's house. He wondered what was in the box, perhaps the same one which Murad placed on the table in Diamond Don's presence, and when he reached the pagan's hut, he became fearful that he had been anticipated by some one whose keen eyes may have watched the yellow thief.

Silver Steve entered the shanty and found his way to the corner.

He raised the board and thrust his eager hand beneath it. The box was there.

Hiding it in his pocket he went back, but not to where he had left the Chinaman.

On the contrary he crossed the Square and entered Diamond Don's house.

"Is this it?" said the Silver Sport, bringing forth the prize and holding it up before the ferret-sport's eyes.

A quick cry from Diamond Don told that it was the same box.

"You have despoiled Murad, the Mysterious," cried Diamond Don.

"No, the blind robbed him."

Diamond Don took the box, and after looking at it awhile, sat down and opened it with the point of his knife.

A bit of paper fell out upon the table, and the hand of the detective picked it up in a jiffy.

"What is it?" asked Silver Steve, bending forward in his eagerness.

"What I thought it held—a record and a ring."

Diamond Don was holding up in the light a ring with a strange setting of jewels, and near it, but underneath his hand, lay the paper as it had fallen from the box.

"This," said the detective gazing at the ring, "This is the ring which belonged to Helen Georges, the child of the old man who was killed in New York some years ago. There is no doubt of its identity for here are the initials: 'H. G.'. The child vanished—she was but a girl of sixteen then. It was reported that she afterward turned up in the West and became the wife of a man named Paul Nolan. When I came across the woman in the mine—the one whom I found underneath the ruins of the camp of the Ten Shanties, I was almost convinced that I had discovered Helen Georges. Now this ring proves what?"

"That she was Helen Georges?" asked Silver Steve.

"That and more," said the ferret sport. "You remember that she by the writing on the wall of her prison told me to avenge her death and find her lost child. Don't you think I am near the end of the long trail, Silver Steve?"

"You ought to know best."

Diamond Don picked up the paper and looked at it a moment.

"Heavens! this seems to furnish the missing link. The strangest part of the whole business is that Paul Nolan, or Murad, the Mysterious, should preserve these relics."

"One of crime's blunders, perhaps."

The ferret sport did not look up, but was reading what he held in his hand.

"Listen!" cried Silver Steve, springing to the door and throwing it open. "Great Scott! they have surrounded Wun Look and are actually trying to break into the shanty."

In another moment the figure of Silver Steve went down the street and all at once he appeared to the crowd in front of his shanty and the man at the door was seized and flung back.

"Stand off!" he cried, facing the lot with a revolver. "This man is not a wild beast that you should seek his blood. Wun Look is my friend—pard, if you will have it so!"

Silence followed his speech and the mob fell slowly back.

"I will answer for him after the fight for the mogulship," he went on.

"There will be no such fight."

"Why not?"

"There's another truce."

"Another truce?" echoed Silver Steve.

"It is a lie! There is no truce!" cried a voice, and those who turned to look at the speaker, saw coming toward the shanty the tall and handsome figure of Lady Jezebel.

"Back to your shanties and prepare to fight for Murad," she continued. "The man from Utah would usurp the Government and make himself dictator. The time for his overthrow has come."

With her hand outstretched, the Queen of Moonstone stood and ordered the crowd away.

"The fight for liberty first. After it the adjustment of other matters. The hand of the Mormon has played its last trump and must fall dead at its owner's side. Long live Murad, the Mogul!"

A cheer responded to Lady Jezebel's words, and the crowd fell back. Silver Steve saw it move toward the woman under the stars, and when he turned back to where Wun Look, so near death, waited for him, he knew that the crisis had arrived.

Lady Jezebel moved toward Murad's house and entered.

"What have you done?" cried the man by whom she was confronted in the first room.

"I have proclaimed war."

"You have opened the battle, have you? You have aroused the men against the common foe?"

"Yes, but you look as though you had seen a ghost."

The look of the Mogul wandered to the safe, and seemed to rest there in a frightened manner.

"I have been robbed," he said.

"Robbed? The wolves robbed me in the mountains, and now you say you have been plundered."

"It is true."

"Who is the thief?"

"Mormon Sol, of course."

"Then we must crush him at once."

"If we can!"

Lady Jezebel clutched the Mogul's arm, and almost dragged him across the room.

"It is the last stand for life and freedom," she said, her lips almost touching his face. "This is the last stand we shall ever make. If we fail now all is lost. Think! We are in the majority. The men of Moonstone are ready to die for you. You have but to lift your hand, and they will fall like wolves upon our enemies, no matter who they are. Do you hesitate? A thousand curses upon your head, Murad of Moonstone, if, at this stage of the game, you play coward, and leave me to fight the Mormon alone and single-handed."

The Mogul started up with a cry.

"Where is he?"

"Where he cannot escape us," was the answer.

"And you have sent the men to their duties?"

"I found them in the act of hanging Wun Look, the sightless; but the revolver of Silver Steve met them at the door."

"Where is Amber?"

"At the house."

Murad the Mogul threw himself into a chair at the table.

"You shall post this," he said, drawing toward him a sheet of paper.

"What, decrees at this time?" cried Lady Jezebel. "No, we don't want a single one. It is time for rope and pistol, not decrees."

She tore the sheet from Murad's hand and flung it across the room.

"I go to work now. If you tremble with all Moonstone at your back, stay and hide here!" she cried, passing to the door where his hand found her wrist, and his eyes, looking down into the depths of hers, tried, as it were, to read what was really passing through her mind.

She shook him loose and opened the door.

"I know what you think," she went on. "You fear the man called Diamond Don. I know that he is a detective, and that he thinks his trail is nearing an end. Well, maybe it is, but it is death for him. We will crush them all, and when the last serpent has been ground to death underneath our heels, we will make the mogulship of Moonstone more powerful and more respected than ever."

Murad fell back, and like a man in a maze looked at the woman who had spoken.

She had broken from all fear and restraint at last.

"Heavens! what a woman," he exclaimed.

"I am not a woman. I am a tigress!" and with these words the door was flung wide, and out into the night stepped majestically the figure of the Queen of Moonstone.

At that instant a loud shout rose beyond the Square, and a man who came from a shanty looked and saw that his appearance had caused the shout to rend the air.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A VACILLATING MOGUL.

THE man from Utah seemed to see that the crisis had been reached, for his lips met and a determined expression settled over his face.

He could see the group that met him from a respectful distance and felt, no doubt, that a nearer acquaintance was about to occur. He stopped in front of the shanty, and for a moment eyed the men on the Square, then turned and went back into the house.

There he took from his bosom a paper which he concealed between two logs, and looked carefully at a revolver which was silver-mounted, and a handsome, but dangerous weapon.

"Where is she? Will she dare to fight me with what I know?" he said aloud. "Will Lady Jezebel face the music and go back on her promises? Will Murad, the Mogul, let her do this, no matter what he would like to see happen?"

Meantime, in another part of Moonstone, a woman was looking into the face of a man who stood near a table, and in whose eyes there was a certain hesitation she did not like.

Lady Jezebel had come back to Murad.

The figure of the Mogul of Moonstone was erect and his face was pale.

"As I have said, you know that this Diamond Don is a ferret!" said Lady Jezebel.

"I know that."

"You know, too, what brought him to Moonstone."

There was no reply for a moment.

The woman of Moonstone advanced nearer and her eyes looked the Mogul through.

"He says he is near the end of the trail," she went on. "Why does he say this when his victim is not Mormon Sol?"

"Go and ask him," cried Murad, suddenly lifting his head and meeting Lady Jezebel's look.

"What if I do? What if I go to Diamond

Don and ask him to tell me all about the trail he has followed these many months?"

"Go to him, I say. Go and get him to tell you, if he will, about the man-hunt he inaugurated long ago."

"You know that he is a tracker, for you confess this; but when I ask you further you stop and seal your lips."

"I have a right to seal them."

The words were sharply and emphatically spoken. The eyes of the pair met.

"What if I should make peace with Mormon Sol?" continued Lady Jezebel.

"You do that? You make peace with this man after all your pretensions of hostilities? You?"

"Why not? You won't fight, not even when cornered? Do you fear the tongue of this spider from Utah. Are you afraid that, even when confronted by your minions, he will turn them against you and win the battle at the last moment?"

"I am not afraid of this. But look here, woman."

"I am listening," said Lady Jezebel. "What is it you want to say?"

"Long ago we met and entered into a partnership which was to be dissolved only by death."

"That is true."

"We became man and wife and, though the parads of Moonstone know it not, we are still husband and wife."

Lady Jezebel bowed, but did not speak.

"If I am downed in this fight where are you?" he went on. "If the man from Utah turns the camp against me what will become of you?"

"I can take care of myself, but there is no need of Mormon Sol winning a victory—none at all."

"We can get rid of him by carrying out our part of the bargain."

"You mean by giving Amber to him? You mean that by doing so we can get rid of him and send him off with the secret of your life still in his possession?"

"We can do that without bloodshed."

"And having done this, you will turn on Diamond Don the ferret, eh?"

"I will turn on him and crush him before he can lift a hand!"

"This is a villainous compromise," said Lady Jezebel. "This would be scandalous."

"There would be no fight over this secret," answered Murad the Mysterious.

"True, but Mormon Sol, who is living treachery, would have the secret still in his keeping. You can't trust a serpent."

"I know that, but it would give us a long breathing spell."

A flash lit up the eyes that regarded Murad.

"There shall be no compromise!" cried Lady Jezebel. "Everything will be settled between now and morning. The Chinaman is under Silver Steve's protection. Those two men are parads united by the friendship of rescue and death. The Silver Sport will stand by the sightless pagan to the last. There shall be no compromise with Mormon Sol! Once, like a fool, I compromised. He frightened me into giving up Tbirza, the runaway, but now there shall be no backward step. We are man and wife, and it is my duty to rescue you from the consequences of the Mormon's game. It shall be done without detriment to Amber's happiness."

"By Jove! I believe you love the girl," cried the Mogul.

"I am attached to her. She is too pure to become the bride of the Mormon monster. She shall never become his wife."

Lady Jezebel went to the door, and from it with her hand on the latch, looked back at Murad the Mogul.

"Yes or no?" she said. "What are you going to do? The papers I sought are in the cavern where the wolves scented me. They can't be reached now, and we must meet Mormon Sol and face him before the parads of the camp. Will you stand by me, or do you recoil from the exposure, and are you ready to see the Mormon win?"

Murad looked at the regal form of Lady Jezebel and seemed to shrink.

"Yes or no?"

"We will fight him," he said.

"That will do. Now, remain here till the ball opens."

"What are you going to do?"

"I intend to deliver the ultimatum."

"When?"

"At once."

"Be careful."

"I will take care of the cause. It is the last battle for the keeping of the secret. You will fight! Murad, those words do you credit?"

She shut the door and was gone while the man in the middle of the room stood like a statue there, and looked at the door which had just closed between them.

He was still in this attitude when a door at his feet opened, and he fell back as he gazed at the man who came up through the floor and planted himself where he could be seen.

If the dead had risen, Murad the Mogul would not have been more astonished.

He was confronted by Mormon Sol, and the dark face and deep-set eyes of the Mormon told

him that his old enemy and antagonist was before him on a delicate and desperate mission.

The sudden appearance of Mormon Sol in that room told the Mogul that he knew the secret of the lion's entrance to the New Ophir and for a moment the two men stood face to face looking at one another like gladiators about to engage.

"You should have come a moment sooner," said Murad.

"What, because she was here?" grinned the Mormon.

"Yes; Lady Jezebel has just departed and she is looking for you."

The eyes of the Mormon seemed to snap.

"She is ruling you, as ever?" he said. "This woman, who is bent on your eternal destruction, is carrying everything with a high hand. She came back from the mountains empty-handed?"

There was no reply.

"She came back without that which she went for. She has broken her bargain and her voice is now for war. Is yours?"

If Murad thought of the answer he had given to Lady Jezebel's "Yes or no?" he did not betray it. He looked at Mormon Sol and seemed to drop his gaze beneath the blazing eyes that looked him through.

"Are you going to fight us all if it comes to open hostilities?" he asked.

"I am going to play my hand," was the answer. "Murad, the Mysterious, there can be peace or war between us. You have the making of whatever you want. I seek no war, but if that woman rules you, as she seems to be doing now, I will be Mogul of Moonstone before another day is gone and the secret of a life will be posted on the tree to be read of all men. It all lies with you, I say," and Mormon Sol, falling back, folded his arms and looked steadily at the man whom he addressed.

There was something striking in the tableau made by the pair as they stood beneath the lamp that swung from the ceiling of the Mogul's room and threw its light everywhere.

They were quite unlike in feature, though in build they were the same.

Suddenly a strange impulse seemed to take possession of Murad.

"Why not settle the question here?" he cried. "We are the sole occupants of this house."

Mormon Sol said nothing.

"I will fight you here—fight for the final mastery and the mogulship of Moonstone. There need be no exposure and no fight in the street, nor on the Plaza. You shall have your choice of weapons, Mormon Sol."

The figure of the Mormon went back a step, and his lips curled with pride and derision.

"I fight no man single-handed in a case of this kind," he said. "I am not here to fight you, Murad. I don't want your life. It is nothing to me. Long ago, when we were friends, and you confided in me nearly everything that happened to you, I said that I would never fight you under any circumstances. I hold the secret of your life. I have it in my possession, and all I want is a new wife, and it is safe. The girl will obey you. Amber, as you call her, will do anything at the command of Lady Jezebel."

"Don't depend too much on the girl," broke in the Mogul. "You don't know everything yet, though you may hold a secret dear to the heart that beats before you now. Don't go too far with the girl's obedience, I say."

"I will risk that if the compact entered into between you and Lady Jezebel on one side and myself on the other is kept. It is the woman who is for war. It is the creature who ensnared you long ago who is for battle notwithstanding the dangerous secret I hold."

"Here, I have weapons of either kind," said Murad, eagerly. "I have knives or pistols. We can fight here—in this room—and the man who goes hence will carry with him the leadership of Moonstone."

"But I say no!"

Murad, the Mysterious, looked across the table and then seemed to think of the effects of Duke Gorman's shots on the Mormon.

"You have the advantage of me," he went on. "A man with a steel doublet should not be afraid to fight with one whose heart is unprotected."

"Unprotected?" laughed the Mormon, throwing his hands to his bosom and suddenly opening his shirt and exposing to Murad's gaze the bare brown skin that covered his own heart.

"I am on an equality with you and the rest of you there."

Murad caught a glimpse of the tattoo on the skin thus exposed and seemed to lean forward to inspect it.

"You carry still the mark on your bosom," he said.

"Yes."

"It has a mate in Moonstone."

"Ha, a mate?"

"Yes. The bosom of Silver Steve is similarly marked."

Mormon Sol was seen to start.

"I am not here to discuss brands," he cried. "What is your answer? This time is finality. It means peace or war. You have power to re-

call the woman who has gone forth with a tiger at her heart. What is your answer, Murad?"

Murad, the Mysterious, stood a moment longer without speaking, and then looking Sol in the eye said:

"Will you return the box?"

"The box?" echoed the Mormon.

"The one you robbed me of—the one taken by your hand from yon safe?"

It was evident that these words were news to the man from Utah. He stared first at Murad and then looked at the safe standing in one corner of the room.

"I never robbed you, Murad."

The Mogul of Moonstone seemed to gasp.

"You did not come up through the floor and plunder the safe when I was out?"

"I did not."

Mormon Sol's reply impressed Murad, the Mysterious.

"I have been robbed," he said. "I have lost something which I would have kept."

"A box, you say?"

"It was taken from that safe, which was locked in a manner known only to me. But let it pass."

The Mogul of Moonstone came round the table, his face white and his lips bitten half through. He was on the eve of yielding to the importunities and threats of this strange, all-powerful man from Utah.

Mormon Sol watched him like a snake watches the charmed bird almost within its jaws. He seemed to see victory within his grasp.

"I must recall Lady Jezebel," said he. "There can be no truce unless she submits."

"You can recall her. She is your wife, and a husband—"

"Stop! Don't speak aloud the relationship that has existed between us!" cried Murad. "Let that secret, kept so well from my men, be a secret still. I will recall Lady Jezebel."

Mormon Sol had won. He still held the trumps of the deck, and was on the top wave in the fight for power and supremacy over the Mogul of the Gold Hills.

But at that moment, and when the hand of Murad touched the bell-cord overhead, the door opened and into the room stepped the very woman who was to be recalled—Lady Jezebel, the Queen of Moonstone.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE BLIND TIGER'S AMBUSH.

WHILE the scenes we have been witnessing were occurring in Murad's house, others just as interesting and exciting were going on in another part of the camp.

The reader has not forgotten Thirza's visit to Amber, and her last words, which pretended to open up to the girl a chance to escape from the Mormon net.

Thirza was cool and collected when she went back to the cabin in which she had taken up her residence since her discovery by Mormon Sol. There was a sorrow on the face of the woman who had been lured from home by the cunning man who, after a life of desperate wickedness, had finally settled down among the Saints and become one of the pillars of the Mormon Church.

It was about the hour of Mormon Sol's interview with Murad that Thirza left her shanty, and with a face firmly set in expression, stole her way down the street to the cabin of her lord and master.

She did not knock at Mormon Sol's door, but opened it and went in.

The room of course was empty, for if she wanted Mormon Sol, she would have to seek him at Murad's house, but Thirza did not know this.

The hunted wife knew that a storm was brewing, and that the time for the last fight, the last play of the game, was at hand.

Thirza looked about her while in the cabin, as if she took great interest in its simple appointments, and all at once her eyes fell upon a bit of paper protruding from between two logs. In another moment it was in her hand.

As Thirza unfolded it she went to the light, but cautiously and with a swift glance at the window. She bent over the little table and began to read.

"Heavens! he prepared this for an emergency," she exclaimed. "This is the secret he has carried so long; this is the power he holds in Moonstone. No wonder Murad fears him; no wonder Lady Jezebel has given up to him his hunted wife at his imperious demands."

As she read on, her face lost color and her eyes seemed to emit a wild light. Her hands trembled, and when she reached the end of the paper, which was closely written, she looked up as if she expected to see the figure of Mormon Sol in the door.

But the spider was not there, and Thirza breathed free once more.

"This would settle the question in Amber's mind," she exclaimed. "This confession would plant her firmly in the path of resistance, and she would balk Mormon Sol by becoming the wife of Silver Steve. I am not a match-maker—my own life has been cursed by a match which was not made in heaven—but sooner than see this young girl become the bride of the man

whose net captured me, I would give her away, if I could, to an Indian!"

With the document left behind by Mormon Sol clutched in her hand, Thirza the Sixth, went toward the door, but stopped before she reached it, for it had opened, and she recoiled from what she saw with a half-stifled cry.

The person that came over the threshold was Wun Look, the blind pagan.

Thirza shrunk back, and from a corner watched the yellow man with her heart in her throat. He came in, shutting the door carefully behind him, and stopped for a little while, as if the heat of the lamp told him that the cabin was lighted up.

"What on earth brings the blind Celestial here?" thought Thirza. "He must know that Mormon Sol is his deadly enemy, but he takes the chances, and invades the lion's den."

Wun Look came on until he had reached the table, when his wandering hand discovered the lamp, which he drew toward him, and with a puff extinguished it. This was so cleverly done that Thirza recalled the Chinaman's boast that he would some day put eyes in his fingers, and see as well as only one.

Despite the extinguishing of the light, the clear starlight streamed into the shanty, and enabled Thirza to see the little figure that found the corner of the shanty opposite the door, and stand there as if waiting for some one.

All at once the full intention of the pagan's play burst upon the Mormon's wife.

There was something so terrible in the blind tiger standing in the dark, waiting for the occupant of the shanty, that Thirza felt a cold chill steal over her, and instead of rushing out, she stood her ground as if fascinated by the sight.

Minutes passed, and the patient pagan moved not.

It was for all the world like a wild beast lying in await for a victim, that Thirza looked on, and waited with Wun Look for Mormon Sol's return.

Twenty minutes went into the past before the little figure of the man in the corner stirred. Then it crept from its ambush, and the long hands began to move along the wall.

Thirza fell back into the corner, and held her breath. What if the hands should find her? What if she was to be the first victim of the blind man's fingers?

The slippered feet of Wun Look made no noise on the floor as they glided over it. His hands were running in and out of every crevice, and he was feeling for something which appeared to be concealed there. If Thirza had not discovered the paper between the logs the yellow hands would have alighted upon it, though she could not see what he would have done with it.

But fortunately for Thirza, Wun Look gave up his search before he got to her corner, and she saw him glide back to his old place where he resumed his vigils for Mormon Sol, whose coming seemed delayed, much to the pagan's disappointment.

The man's mission could not be mistaken, for it was written on the leathery features, and in the long clinched hands of the son of Confucius.

More than once had Thirza pitied him as he stole from street to street, groping his way through a world of darkness and she had inwardly hoped that some day he would find the robber of his eyes and pay him back.

At last Wun Look felt his way to the door.

Thirza saw him open it and, leaning out, listen with his head turned toward the Plaza. He was listening for the coming of Mormon Sol!

"Not yet, but he will come," she heard him say as he shut the door and went back to his watch.

Thirza thought it time to leave the yellow tiger alone and began to move toward the door herself.

The quick ears of Wun Look detected the movement and he straightened and turned his face toward the portal. But Thirza kept on, reached the door and opened it, letting in a draught of cool night air.

Her last look was at the man waiting in the web of the spider for the spider's return.

Wun Look's face had undergone a change. She could see that the lips were welded and that the lines of the face were tensely drawn, that he had become animal and had doffed every human instinct.

With a shudder which she could not resist, Thirza sprung out and fled. She ran down the street and never thought of hunting up the man whose life was in danger at the deadly hands of the blind, but drew up at length in front of the house inhabited by Amber.

She knocked and then entered. As she appeared to the girl who had not had time to reach the door, there was a slight cry and Amber, falling back, stood off as if the look of Thirza had deprived her of the power of utterance.

"You will not hold back now!" cried Thirza, holding aloft the paper she had taken from between the logs. "I have here the confession that will decide you. Amber, you must become the wife of some one worthy of you before the Mormon wins the battle."

Amber's look became a stare.

"But he can't win!" she said when she recovered.

"The fight is his unless—"

Thirza thought of the human tiger crouching in the dark, but she went on:

"This man knows everything. He holds the lives of Lady Jezebel and Murad in his hands. He will hold them to the compact. Even now he is showing his last hand—to them. If they resist he will play for all it is worth in presence of all Moonstone. This man is known to me with all his coolness and power."

Amber reached for the document, but Thirza held it back.

"No, it is not for you," she said. "I discovered it accidentally and the secret it holds is mine now."

"It concerns me?" cried Amber.

"It concerns more than you," was the answer.

The frame of Amber shook with emotion and she looked at the Sixth wife with feelings she could not suppress.

"There must be no hesitation now," continued Thirza. "I tell you that the game will be won by Mormon Sol. He will come from Murad's house with the trumps all in his hands. This man is in league with Satan!"

Amber's face got a sudden pallor, and she retreated from the outstretched hand of Thirza.

"If you hold the secret in your hand, why not strike?" she said. "You have been in the net. You know who and what this man is. You can speak and turn the camp against him. Even if he holds Murad and Lady Jezebel under his hands, the men of Moonstone will believe Thirza, the hunted victim of the Mormon serpent."

Thirza stood like a statue in front of the beauty of Moonstone.

"Will you keep your lips sealed at this crisis, and with the secret in your possession?" continued Amber, glancing at the paper in the woman's hand. "Will you see me fall into the net which has broken up your life happiness? In Heaven's name, who is Mormon Sol?"

There was no reply, but the hand of Thirza gripped tighter than ever the document found in the Mormon's house, and repulsed the eager Amber, who came forward with her last words.

"There is but the one chance left. You refuse it. The man known as Lion Mark is a parson—"

"Not yet!" interrupted Amber. "I have known for some time that Lion Mark once took orders, but— No, we will fight the battle!"

"Only to lose it," said Thirza, looking pityingly at Amber. "Girl, it must be done. Stay where you are. I will bring them here. I won't be gone ten minutes."

Thirza bounded away and Amber saw her figure flit through the door, and heard her feet for a moment outside.

"She ought to know, but I can't believe that Mormon Sol will again bring both Lady Jezebel and Murad to terms. What is this infamous secret which Thirza has discovered? She will come back with Lion Mark and Silver Steve. She will bring to this cabin the man I love, though no words of affection have ever passed between us. Is it the only hope? Is Thirza right?"

Amber went to the door and looked out.

She saw a dark figure for a second on the Plaza, knew that it was Thirza on her mission, and then fell back and closed the door.

Going to one corner of the room, she took from underneath the pillow of her couch a little knife, with a long, dagger-like blade, and stood erect in the light, with her white hand wound resolutely about the hilt.

Why didn't some one come?

She heard no noise at all; she looked out and saw no one on street or Square.

All at once, however, there came to her the sound of footsteps at the door.

Still clutching the dagger, Amber of Moonstone did not move.

Who was about to enter—friend or foe?

It was on Amber's lips to say; "Come in," but she did not, and continued to watch the portal.

It opened at last, and into the room staggered Lady Jezebel, her hands clinched and her face colorless and pain-struck.

"My God! what has occurred? In the name of heaven, mother, where have you been?"

The tall figure of the Queen of Moonstone fell back and Amber saw her cover her face with her hands.

"Don't repeat that word!" she cried. "Don't stand there and call me by the most endearing name that can fall from the lips of a living being. It is all over! Amber, here is the bosom that deserves the dagger you hold in your hand. The man went back to cowardice. I had fired his blood and he swore to fight this enemy with the dread power; but he is cringing again. Murad is the sworn ally of Mormon Sol. The two have combined and you are the stakes of the game won by the hand from Hades!"

A wild cry welled from the lips of the girl before Lady Jezebel, and the dagger fell from her grasp.

In another moment it was seized by the Queen of Moonstone, but with a sudden bound Amber tore it from her hand and flung it across the room.

"Not yet!" she cried. "In ten minutes I will be a wife, but not the Mormon's."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE TURN OF THE TIDE.

LADY JEZEBEL had not overstated the case to the beauty of the camp.

She had just come from Murad's house, having witnessed there a scene which had stirred her blood as it had never been stirred by any similar scene.

It was true that Murad, brave for a time, had fallen under the baleful influence of the man from Utah, and that Mormon Sol, riding the topmost wave, had cowed the Mogul once more and was holding in his hand the trump of the desperate game.

Murad, the Mysterious, had even tried to persuade Lady Jezebel to acquiesce in the decision he had made to turn Amber over to Mormon Sol and thus purchase the keeping of the secret by which the Saint had ruled his destiny; but the woman had refused, and breaking from the conference, had come to Amber with the words we have just recorded.

Emerging from the house of the Mogul and close upon Lady Jezebel's heels, the Mormon walked erect with the triumph of an eagle in his eyes.

He carried in his hand the last document promulgated by the man he had subdued and those who saw him come forth watched him walk across the Square and proceed to nail it to the tree there.

This paper was a proclamation to the effect that a treaty of peace had been entered into between Murad and Mormon Sol, and it called on the men of Moonstone to withdraw their hatred from the Mormon and treat him as a friend of their leader's.

Could anything have been more humiliating than this?

When the Mormon had posted the decree he looked at it a moment and turned toward his own shanty.

He was seen by Thirza who knew who waited for him there, yet she did not rush forward and tell him that the blind tiger of China was lurking in the dark with eyes in the ends of his long yellow fingers.

But instead of going on to the shanty, Mormon Sol turned to one side and entered Brushwood's.

As his tall figure was seen approaching the counter the crowd there moved after him, as if for the moment it thought the man from Utah had deliberately walked into their power; but he turned upon them and threw up his hands.

"There has been a treaty of amity, friends," said Mormon Sol. "I have just come from Murad's and we understand one another perfectly. You will read the decree fresh from his hands and know that all is correct. Gentlemen, what will you have?"

There was not the eager rush for the bar that the Mormon looked for; but the dark-shirted pards held back and looked strangely at the man who had spoken.

Murad and Mormon Sol friends? A treaty of amity?

They could not believe it.

But they made way for Mormon Sol when he came down the aisle, and all saw him walk out as if he had really won the victory implied in his language.

But he had scarcely left the den ere the form of Lady Jezebel appeared in the doorway, and some of the men set up a shout at sight of her.

"The villainy of villainies has been consummated!" cried the Queen of Moonstone as she came forward, her eyes blazing and her white hands shut. "Murad is under the spell of the accursed eyes of Mormon Sol, and he has made an abject coward of him. He has surrendered, but I have not. He wears the yoke, but I spurn it now and forever!"

"What's that?" said the man who stopped out in the starlight and listened with his face turned toward Brushwood's.

It was Mormon Sol and he has stepped toward the den, his face flushed with excitement and his eyes on fire.

"She is going to resist, is she? She hasn't surrendered, but is going to fight me after all? I will show her the hand I have been holding back. I will play my last card against this woman—one she doesn't dream of."

Back he went, and in a moment he was seen at the open door of the den.

"Yonder he stands. There stands the man who is in league with Satan for the Mogulship of Moonstone and more," cried Lady Jezebel, whirling upon Mormon Sol the moment he reached the door and covering him with her hand.

The Mormon grinned.

"I resist your power. I repudiate all bargains heretofore existing between us. I throw from my shoulders the yoke I have worn, and from this moment on you will find between you and the stakes of this desperate game, the hand of Lady Jezebel."

"I will, eh?" and the Mormon crossed the threshold and stood in the light of the ten lamps of Brushwood's. "I will find you in my path. You don't control the men of Moonstone. They obey the decrees of Murad, their master. They stand by him, and not by the creature who inspired him and in the shadow of whose hand his life has been withered."

These were bitter words, and found their way

with the cutting qualities of a knife to the heart of the woman who listened.

"Call me what you please," she said, coolly, as if she had mentally resolved not to become excited under the taunts of the man she so cordially hated. "I am Lady Jezebel, or I am not, just as you will have it. But who and what are you?"

She even advanced down the aisle between the tables, her eyes fixed upon him and her whole figure quivering with passion.

"You may hypnotize those who are to be your victims and throw over some the net of your infamous power; but there shall be one who will resist, and that one is Lady Jezebel."

Again the Mormon laughed.

"You are marked," she went on. "You wear on your breast a brand which is accursed. You have been bandit, outlaw, murderer. You have woven your webs like the spider that lurks in the forest path under the matted leaves, and your sting has been slow death to those who have felt it in their blood. I resist! I proclaim your mission here now, to the pards of Moonstone. You came hither under pretense of hunting down a runaway wife, and taking her back to the human slavery of the land across the mountain. But that was not your real purpose. You seek another victim. You have set your baleful eyes on the beauty and purity of a child of mystery, and you have bent every energy to the winning of this game. You have played your hand with this end in view. You have held over the heads of Murad and myself a secret which frightens the Mogul, and once paled my cheeks. You have told him in my presence that if we resist, the secret comes out, and you become the Mogul of Moonstone."

Lady Jezebel was standing within ten feet of the man, who, hearing every word as it dropped from her tongue, was watching her with bated breath.

"You have entered into a compact of amity, you call it, with Murad," she went on. "You should call it a compact of infamy. You have 'spelled' Murad with the arts of magic, of which you are master. You have compelled him to sign a compact of alliance, and you carry it next your heart now. Mormon Sol, you deserve a thousand deaths, and if Moonstone approves this hellish agreement, may every cabin and its tenants sink deeper than the uttermost abyss of Tartarus."

"Is that all?" asked the Mormon, who all this while had appeared as cool as a practiced desperado. "Lady Jezebel, so-called, are you through?"

"In a moment. You have compelled Murad to give over to you the beautiful girl who has been my companion for years. You expect to see her enthroned in your house in Mormondom, but that event will never take place."

"Why not? What have you, woman with a record—what have you to do with the decrees of Murad of Moonstone, no matter what they be?"

"I protect my own!"

The Mormon, cool up to this time, was seen to start. He recoiled an inch, but suddenly planted himself firmly where he rested, and looked at her as before.

"Your own!" he echoed, recalling her last sentence to all. "If you would do that, go back across the desert, and stand by the grave of your first born, and fight from it the vultures that make it their banquet board. Go back there, I say, and do this if you would protect your own."

But Lady Jezebel did not move, nor was one vestige of life swept from her countenance by the words of the Mormon spider.

"My own is nearer than you think. Mormon Sol, you may hold some secrets in your hands, but I hold others as great. I shall protect my own, no matter what says the treaty between you and Murad, the Mogul. I am here to tell you once for all that the hand of Lady Jezebel will tear victory from your grasp, and that, if not a man stands with her, she will resist alone."

"Wait and see," cried the Mormon.

He turned and went toward the door, his laugh ringing in the ears of all, and for a moment longer Lady Jezebel stood and watched him cross the steps of the den.

"I ask no help," she said, turning to the silent men. "I seek no allies in this fight. I shall resist alone if you are to obey the forced decree of the man Murad, your master. Mormon Sol is playing his cards for the hand of Amber, the beautiful—the one good woman of Moonstone. If she falls into his power through the cowardice of any one of us, may the blood of the cowards dry up in their veins, and the vultures tear from their bosoms their hearts yet warm!"

She was at the door and facing them all.

A second of doubt and silence ensued, then the bulky figure of a bearded man came down the aisle and turned to the crowd.

"Lady Jezebel shall have one recruit and, if it be so, Murad one traitor!" he exclaimed.

"No, Lucky Luke, I will fight him alone. He doesn't know my hand. He hasn't had a glimpse of the trumps I hold."

Lady Jezebel waved her hand to the startled crowd, and before another could come out on her side she had vanished, and those who ran to

the door saw her figure moving toward the tree on the Square.

When she reached the tree, up went her hand and the decree was snatched loose and thrown to the winds.

"It shall be so with the men who made Murad a coward; he, too, shall become the prey of the winds!" she cried.

The tall man who saw her commit this act stood near a shanty toward which he had directed his steps.

Mormon Sol was nearly home.

At the door of the shanty he stopped and watched the vanishing figure of Lady Jezebel, and when he could see it no longer he turned away.

"Lights out, eh?" he said, aloud, as he entered the cabin. "I certainly left a lamp here when I went away."

He struck a light, went toward the table, but all at once something arose in his path and he fell back with a sudden start.

"Ho, you?—you young yellow cat?" he exclaimed, catching sight of the rising form in the glare of his lucifer.

There was a cry and straight at him, guided by his voice, went the long, crouching body of Wun Look, the pagan.

Down went the match to the floor and Mormon Sol seized the wrists that had already found his throat and tried to tear them loose.

But he was forced back to the wall and then against the door, all the time struggling against the enemy as he had never fought before.

Deeper and deeper seemed to sink the avenging hands of the blind pagan, and although Mormon Sol had the strength of a lion, he was on the eve of succumbing to the inevitable.

But a lucky turn aided him.

He tore one hand loose and then the other, but they fastened on him again, and he was in danger of having his own orbs gouged out, for that was now the Celestial's tactics, and already everything was black before his eyes.

Suddenly the door opened.

The man who came in, letting inside a flood of night-light, seemed to take in the situation at once.

He seized Wun Look and pulled him off, then, as Mormon Sol tried to assume the offensive, he was caught and thrown across the room.

"Silver Steve!" cried the Mormon.

Holding off Wun Look from his enemy, the Silver Sport looked at the man from Utah and said calmly:

"Let this be your last night in Moonstone."

"It is to be the first of many," was the quick reply.

"Queen Jezebel has won the camp over to her."

"Never! The men belong to Murad and Murad belongs in turn to me."

"Listen! Come to the door."

Silver Steve threw wide the portal and Mormon Sol saw on the Plaza a blaze of torches and the forms of fifty men.

"Down with the Man from Mormondom!" rent the air.

"Do you doubt now?" asked the Branded Sport.

There was no answer; the Mormon's lips were mute.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE LAST TURN OF FORTUNE'S DICE.

SILVER STEVE, the athlete, seized Mormon Sol's hand and led him out into the starlight and they stood together for a moment and watched the torches and the men they revealed.

The tide had turned. The pards of Moonstone were rebellious and had turned from the man they had served to enlist in the cause of Amber and Lady Jezebel.

"There is a chance left. They will respect me," said Silver Steve.

Mormon Sol turned upon him and gave him a look of defiance and cool demonism.

"You would save me, would you?" he said.

"Why shouldn't I?" was the reply. "We are marked alike and by Red Joachim. Besides, you can't win the game you are playing. The stakes have passed from your hands. The wife of one man can't become the wife of another."

Mormon Sol broke from the grasp of the Branded Sport and from a short distance looked at him in amazement.

"Amber is a bride and—"

"Amber a wife?" broke in the man from Utah.

"Amber is my bride!"

"Yours?"

"Mine!"

For a moment the tall figure of the Mormon seemed on the eve of launching itself upon Silver Steve, but it recoiled and threw out a quivering hand.

"Then I shall live to hunt you down with the pertinacity that characterizes all my trails! I am Mormon Sol wherever I go, and the memory of our mother shall not stand between us a single moment!"

The following second, as a rush toward the pair was made by the pards of Moonstone, Silver Steve threw himself before the man from

Utah, and as the crowd came up he caught Mormon Sol's shirt front and parted it in the glare of the dozen torches.

"Desperate as this man is, men of Moonstone, it is my duty to stand between him and death," said the Silver Sport. "Behold on his bosom the same brand that is found on mine. The same hand branded both of us, and when Red Joachim, the outlaw, swooped down upon our home and gave us his mark, we went out into the world, one to become your companion, the other, after a life of unparalleled treachery, to blossom out a Saint of the Mormon Church. *This man is my brother!*"

The two men standing side by side formed a tableau for the startled pards of Moonstone, and they fell back from them, almost forgetting Mormon Sol and his crimes in the startling revelation just made by Silver Steve.

Silver Steve's brother!

There on the breast of the two men shone the same marks and all now saw what had hitherto escaped their notice, the strange resemblance in other ways.

"Come," said Silver Steve to the Mormon. "This is the way to safety. As a brother, I save you; as a man, I should let you perish at the hands of the pards of Moonstone."

Mormon Sol drew back from the touch and looked at the crowd. His fingers were wound about the butt of his revolver which was half drawn, and there leaped up in his eyes a desperate resistance which threatened direful results.

The game was lost, why not resist to the bitter end?

All at once there fell upon Mormon Sol from behind a little man whose arms went round the dark brown neck, and whose yellow fingers, before Silver Steve could prevent, were buried in the Mormon's throat.

It was Wun Look, the blind pagan.

"Eye for eye!" was the wild cry that fell upon the ears of all, and when Silver Steve pulled the Chinaman from his victim, there was a yell which reached the man waiting for results in the house of the Mogul.

They gathered round the man writhing on the ground with his hands pressed against his torn face, and the figure that crept from the spot laughed with the glee of a fiend.

"I told them so! I said that when the last card was played it should be mine," chuckled this person. "I put eyes in my fingers, and they found the hand that robbed me of my sight!"

And across the door of Wun Look's shanty, with a cry of delight, fell the little man who had avenged his eyes.

That night yet Murad the Mysterious was visited by a man into whose eyes he looked, with some of the fear of the last few hours still visible on his face.

"I have the box," said Diamond Don. "I received the stolen box from the hands of Silver Steve, to whom it was given by Wun Look, the burglar of your safe. Murad, you are the slayer of the woman whom I discovered in the mine beneath the ruins of the Ten Shanties; you are the old Paul Nolan of my trail."

There was no reply, only the hand of the Mogul reached half-way across the table, and his eyes studied the ferret's face for some time.

"There is one thing yet to be unraveled," continued Diamond Don. "Who was Mormon Sol, besides Silver Steve's brother?"

"That man was my old pard of the early mines."

"He once lived in the East, eh?"

"In New York. He turned Mormon to hide his identity. He knew from his first contact with Silver Steve that they were brothers, and when they first met at Brushwood's, Steve whispered to him what he more than suspected; but what cared he for that? You want me, don't you, Diamond Don?"

"You know your guilt. The wife you left to die, shut up by your hands, left a child. She begged the person who found her to devote his life to the finding of that child."

A smile passed over the Mogul's face.

"Well, haven't you found her?" he asked.

"It is Amber, then?"

"Have you asked Lady Jezebel?"

"She calls Amber her own offspring."

"Send her to me."

Half an hour later the figure of Lady Jezebel stood haughty before the Mogul as he sat in his chair in the house of mystery and crime.

"Now for my secret," said the Queen of Moonstone. "Amber is your child, Murad. She is the child of the wife you walled up in the mines of the Ten Shanties. I discovered her accidentally, and raised her as my own. I have watched over her, and when I saw you about to sell her to Mormon Sol, to save the secret of your past, my whole soul revolted, though at one time I acquiesced in the infamy. But she is your own daughter."

The frame of the Mogul was seen to quiver; he put out his hands, but Lady Jezebel drew back.

"No! you belong to this man now. You are Diamond Don's, for he is the hunter of the guilty."

In a moment Murad of Moonstone was on his feet.

"Where is the man who failed? Where is Mormon Sol?" he asked.

"He is a banished man, groping his way through the world, and followed, as we suspect, by one in the same condition. The blind hunts the blind. Wun Look is tracking the man who robbed him of sight."

It is six months later and we are again in Moonstone.

The memory of Murad, the Mogul, is still fresh in the minds of the men who work the mines and sit at Brushwood's tables, but the Mogul himself is gone.

Diamond Don has won his game, and the Mysterious, tried and sent into perpetual exile, not to the rope, for Amber's sake, who never was permitted to know all, no longer plays fast and loose with fate, and the figure of Lady Jezebel has vanished forever.

Amber, the happy wife of Silver Steve, the new Mogul of Moonstone, brings love and purity to the cabins of all, and the story of a blind man wandering through the mountains and plucking flowers where they grow in profusion "for Amber, the beautiful," is one of the pretty tales of the San Juan country.

Long ago the corpse of Mormon Sol was found in a mountain pass, and the beaks of vultures had torn from his breast the brand which proclaimed him the outlawed brother of the Silver Sport.

Though terrible his fate, who shall say that it was not just?

As for Thirza, she vanished about the same time as Lady Jezebel, and many believe that the two women, companions in misfortune, went off together.

THE END.

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